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*China's Courts
and Concubines*

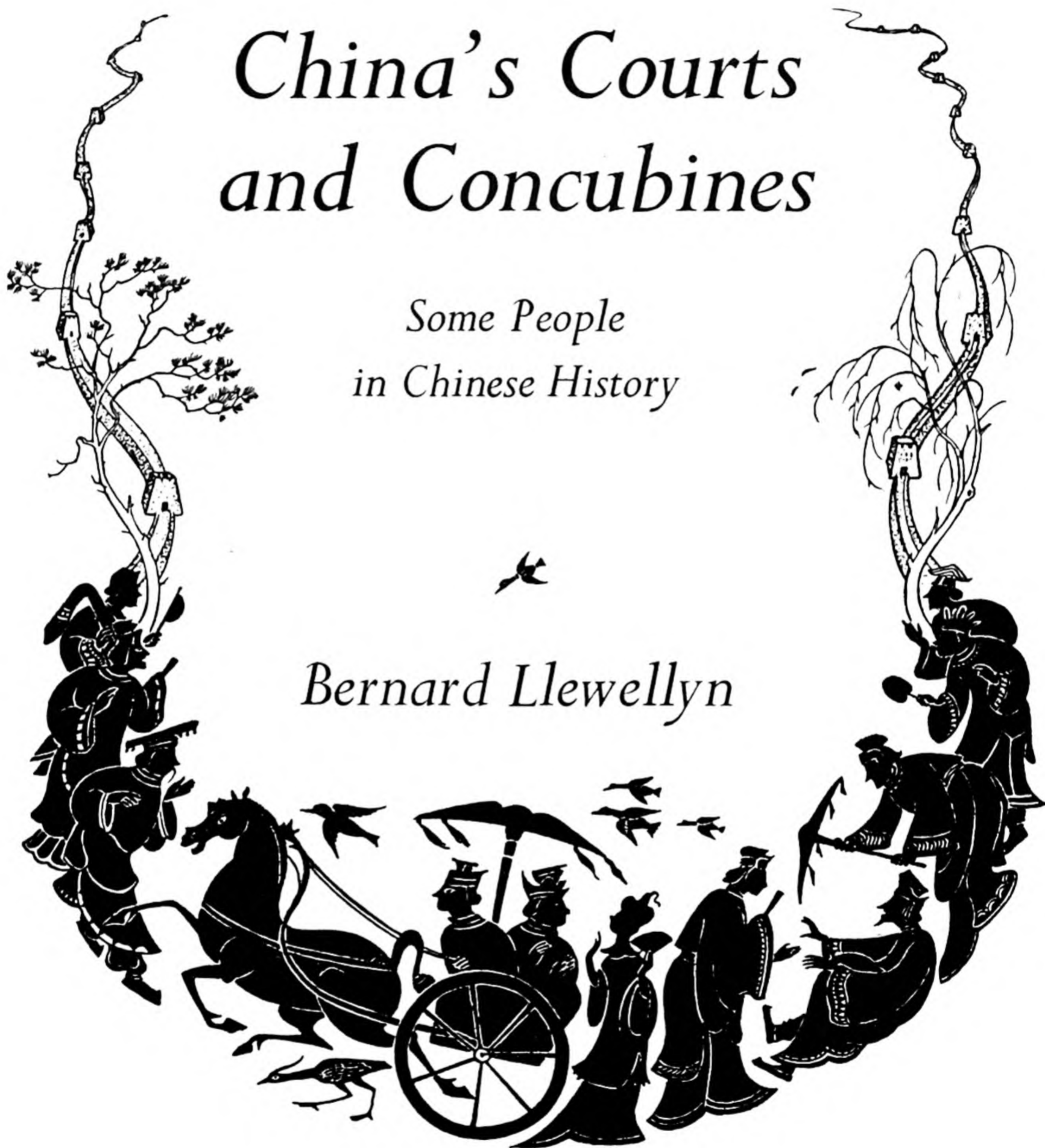
by Bernard Llewellyn

*From the Back Streets of Bengal
I Left My Roots in China*

China's Courts and Concubines

*Some People
in Chinese History*

Bernard Llewellyn



Illustrated by Pauline Diana Baynes

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NO one can write a book of this kind without being conscious of the great debt he owes to the research and scholarship of many men and women. Often their work lies neglected on the shelves of our great libraries gathering the dust; but it is there. And because it is there, others can use it for their own purposes.

No sinologue who may chance to turn over these pages will have any doubt—especially if he looks at the *Notes and Sources* at the end of the book—that this volume is not for him. These potted biographies have no academic pretensions. Indeed, I hesitated at first to include references lest it should seem to the ordinary reader that I was aspiring to a scholarship I do not possess. But since I owe every scrap of this material to the patient researches of so many people, I thought it better to take the risk of appearing a little pretentious and make my obligations to others quite clear. Thus I have gathered together the references at the end of the book. There they will not bother the reader who is not interested in such matters; while they may encourage others to dig for themselves in these rich mines of history and legend.

To all the authors and publishers whose joint labours have put me in their debt, I offer my grateful thanks.



Thanks are also due to the editors and publishers of *Everybody's*, *Eastern World*, *Chambers's Journal* and *The Malayan Monthly* in whose pages I first told some of these stories; and to my friend John Cowan who, during my absence in the Far East, agreed to undertake the preparation of the Index.

Shirley, Surrey

BERNARD LLEWELLYN

INTRODUCTION

WHEN Du Halde's *The General History of China* appeared in four volumes before the British public in 1736, the translator felt able to make a bold statement in his Preface. After reviewing the 'extraordinary Precautions' taken by the author to check his facts, he went on to say that 'the Publick may rest satisfied that what is here advanced is strictly true, which cannot be said of anything of this kind that has been hitherto publish'd'.

I wish I could repeat such brave words here, and assure my readers that everything they read in the following pages 'is strictly true'. The men and women whose lives are written of in this book were real people: that much is certain. It is the details of their lives that may be disputed now and again.

Most of them lived so long ago that the events which made up their lives are buried as deep below the rubble of the years as were the walls of Troy beneath the earth at Hissarlik. That past is gone for ever. We cannot resurrect it to look at it again with our own eyes. We can only try to remember it; and inevitably, in that process of remembering, people—some of whom are far more credulous than others—recall different things. It is true of our own past. How much truer is it of China's past!

It is the stuff of other people's memories that makes up these pages. I cannot swear that their memories have never played them tricks when my own has failed me more than once. Thus you will read of magicians and immortals; of dragons and pills of eternal life; of generals and eunuchs; of emperors and poets; of palaces and concubines. And some of you who do not like the limits of the possible to range too far from the familiar and everyday may feel that occasionally truth has taken flight into the realms of fancy. It may be so. Who am I to decide such grave issues?

All I will say is that I have made nothing up. If there are

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liars along the route, they were there before I came along. If I mislead now and again it is without malice, and without much hope of doing better.

Of some of the people I have tried to bring to life for a little while in these pages many conflicting accounts have been written. Fact and legend have grown up together on the friendliest terms and, though I am no sinologue, I think it useless to pretend that the truth can ever be known in any detail at all. Over half the people mentioned here lived and died before Harold lost his eye and his life on the field at Senlac.

Rumours, stories, ballads, play-cycles, novels have not ceased to embroider the bare accounts in the old records. Let the scholars dig and probe as they will, the raw materials on which they must work can never, after all these years, be made the foundation for the kind of 'certainty' some people demand. Even, as we shall see, those final decades of the nineteenth century are clothed in so much obscurity that, had I felt so inclined, I could have given the Grand Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi a character with which she would have been better pleased.

Such a word of warning is only fair to the reader who wants to know exactly where he stands. All colourful history and biography is an interpretation, nothing more. We try to interpret events so that they become intelligible to us. The Confucian scholars used the past as a mirror to reflect the vices and virtues of their own times. The lives of notable men and women were used to illustrate the lessons taught by the great sages. Who can doubt that sometimes the lives of the good were embellished still more, and the lives of the wicked painted blacker than they were?

Yet these notables cannot be ignored because we are not certain of their birthplaces and are doubtful about their dates. These were for the most part people who had become legends long before America was discovered. You come across them not only as you turn over the pages of old books in dusty libra-

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ries; you find reminders of them in the talk of the people, in the scrolls of the curio shops, in Chinese place-names, in the presence of the silent tombs.

Travelling in China, I have passed through Sword Gate Pass as Ming Huang did after he had looked for the last time on the strangled corpse of Yang Kuei-fei. I have wandered through the Ch'angan streets and tried to picture that city as it was when T'ang civilization was the finest in the world. I have looked for the tomb of the First Emperor by the Wei River. It was in the ancient city of Loyang that I first marvelled at the exploits of Chu-ko Liang. In the gloomy courtyards of the Forbidden City I have brooded on murder and intrigue. And in many places eating and drinking with Chinese friends I have envied the capacity of Li Po!

In all these places and a thousand more the history of China was fashioned: in them its glories waxed and waned. But the past has been kept alive in the minds of the Chinese people through strange tales of sages and heroes, fair ladies and emperors, and wizards who did wonderful things.

We are told that, when the German poet Heine came to write his *Memoirs* in his old age, he found it impossible to distinguish between the facts and fantasies of boyhood. So too, the Chinese, looking back over an infinitely greater period of time, have found them intermingling. It is not for us who have our own historical fictions and belong to a culture so much younger than theirs to be hypercritical.

The fourteen brief lives that have been set side by side within the covers of this book do not constitute an attempt to cut a representative cross-section from the men and women who have figured in China's past; the omission of the great religious teachers and philosophers is evidence of that. They are simply people who have interested me, and who will, I hope, interest the western reader.

If the good people in these pages are outnumbered by the bad, this is not because I share and have sought to illustrate

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Gibbon's view that history 'is little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind'. It just happened that way.

There is no moral. Or if there is, my readers must discover it for themselves.



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I



The Cinderella of Chulo

HSI SHIH

IN Chinese history and legend there have been four superlatively beautiful women; but Hsi Shih, who has been called the Chinese Venus, was the most beautiful of them all. Her surpassing beauty made this peasant girl the consort of a king. And with her smile she laid waste a kingdom.

She was said to be so lovely that the moon hid its face in envy, while the flowers blushed because she was so much more beautiful than they.

Hsi Shih¹ was born in the little village of Chulo, not far from the great city of Hangchow, capital of Chekiang Province. Her parents were nobodies and never really understood how so beautiful a child had been born to them. Her mother, who did some weaving to supplement the meagre income which her husband got from collecting firewood, put it down to the fact that for months preceding the birth of the child she had drunk from the pure waters of the stream which ran in front of their hovel. It was as good an explanation as any other!

By the time she was sixteen, Hsi Shih was known locally as Hsi the Beauty. She earned her living washing silk floss in the stream, and spent a lot of time looking at her reflection in the water. Nor was she the only one to marvel at the rosy cheeks, the teeth like melon seeds, the soft complexion with skin as smooth as congealed ointment, the raven black hair, the slender hands whose fingers tapered away like bamboo shoots. People came to look at her while she worked, and a wander-

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ing fortune-teller prophesied that her destiny would be no common one.

He was right. The Chinese Cinderella did not have to wait long for her prince.

At this time—the opening decades of the fifth century B.C.—the warlike feudal states of Wu and Yueh were continually at each other's throat, victory favouring first one side and then the other. Eventually King Fu Chai of Wu, whose capital was at Soochow in modern Kiangsu province, got the better of the exchanges, utterly defeating the Yueh army. For three years the Yueh ruler was forced to groom the royal horses in the enemy stables and to serve as a menial at the court. At the end of this period of servitude he was allowed to return to his defeated kingdom, which was now relegated to the position of a vassal state. There King Kou Chien remembered the indignities he had suffered and brooded long and earnestly over his revenge.

The plan which was to upset the placid peasant life of Hsi Shih is attributed to Kou Chien's chief minister, Wen Chung, who suggested making the enemy ruler a present of a beautiful damsel who would take his mind off state affairs and generally undermine the security of the country. 'The intangible power of a woman's beauty and artfulness,' said the minister, 'may lead to the destruction of a nation.'

It took a long time to search the kingdom for a suitable lady. But the search eventually ended at a humble peasant cottage with a stream which people called Beauty's Brook running past the door and the lovely Hsi Shih within.

'At dawn a simple Yueh Chi girl she was;
At dusk a queen of Wu State she became.'²

According to the Chinese sage Chuang-tzu, this maiden's beauty increased a hundredfold when she knitted her brows. Other Chulo village girls tried to copy this trait of hers; but they became even more hideous with disastrous results to

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their chances! One such ugly wench frowned to such effect that all the wealthy young bachelors in the neighbourhood barricaded their doors and refused to go out, while children ran screaming to their mothers.

For three years Hsi Shih lived in the royal court at Hangchow, being tutored for the day when she would be sent as a concubine to the King of Wu. All the arts that could enhance her natural fascination were taught her.

These arts were well known in China even then. In later centuries travellers to China were to rave over the attraction exercised by Chinese courtesans, who had regularly exercised their profession, with the sanction of the authorities, since the seventh century B.C. Marco Polo, well used to the beauties of Italian women, tells of the ladies he found at the end of the thirteenth century in this same part of the world where Hsi Shih was born. He describes the courtesans of Hangchow, which he calls Kinsai. These accomplished ladies, he says, 'are perfect in the arts of blandishment and dalliance, which they accompany with expressions adapted to every description of person, insomuch that strangers, who have once tasted of their charms, remain in a state of fascination, and become so enchanted by their meretricious arts, that they can never divest themselves of the impression. Thus intoxicated with sensual pleasures, when they return to their homes they report that they have been in Kinsai, or the Celestial city, and pant for the time when they may be enabled to revisit paradise.'³

Thus embellished by the secret arts and mysteries of her sex Hsi Shih became still more ravishing. It is not surprising that her tutor Fan Li fell hopelessly in love with her, and she with him. Only by putting the Four Proprieties of chastity, quiet work, gentle speech and modest demeanour into effect was Hsi Shih able to keep her mind on the task that had been entrusted to her.

In the kingdom of Wu, this novel form of tribute was eagerly awaited by the King. He scoffed at the advice of the wisest

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man at his court, old Wu Tzu-hsu, who feared the Greeks even when they brought gifts, and suspected the beautiful concubine was a trap. Had not, Wu Tzu-hsu pointed out, courtesans brought about the fall of bygone dynasties? Could it not happen again in Wu?

Chinese scholars were as apt as the lawyers in discovering precedents, and Wu's memory of the ancient books had not betrayed him. There were three notorious examples of beautiful women who had caused the collapse of dynasties. First in time was the vicious and enchanting Mo Hsi, who was beloved of the tyrant Chieh of the Hsia dynasty. The greatest delight of this couple was to go boating on a lake filled with wine, while around them a bevy of naked men and women took part in a drunken orgy. Rebellion when it finally came could hardly have been unexpected.

Then there was the lovely and wicked T'a Chi who captivated the giant Shang Emperor Chou Hsin, of whom it was said that he refuted good advice with his eloquence, and with his wit veiled his faults. This tyrant possessed a scientific curiosity. He had his live father's heart exposed to see if it had seven orifices as he suspected; he cut open the bellies of women in childbirth to discover the child's sex; he broke open men's bones in winter to see if the marrow had frozen.⁴ And he loved T'a Chi and neglected his kingdom. When rebellion succeeded, he set fire to his palace and perished in the flames. But the lovely T'a Chi was executed by a man who had to mask his eyes against the appeal of her charms.

The third was Pao Ssu, concubine of Yu the Gloomy, Emperor of Chou. She had extravagant tastes like the others, and loved to tear fine lengths of expensive silk into useless strips. Like her lord, she seldom smiled; and it was to make her smile that the Emperor lit the beacon fires which were to rally his retainers to the defence of the throne. The experiment worked. Pao Ssu shrieked with laughter to see the troops assembling at this false alarm. But the officers, who disliked

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being made fools of for a lady's pleasure, vowed not to be fooled again. So when the throne was really threatened and the signal beacons lit, no notice was taken and the gloomy pair fell into rebel hands.

Wu Tzu-hsu knew the precedents all right, and felt his suspicions were justified. But Fu Chai in his wisdom decided that things were different. History did not repeat itself. It could not happen to him. In blissful ignorance he sat on his golden throne, attended by his retinue, waiting for the heralds who would announce the arrival of the peerless girl whose reputation had preceded her.

She entered the palace like a princess of royal blood, her long black hair ornamented with pearls and kingfisher feathers. On her lips was the smile that was to bring death and ruin to a people.

The story tellers assure us that from the moment he saw her, Fu Chai never really had a chance. He was utterly captivated by this woman who was fairer than all his concubines. There is a tale that Wu Tzu-hsu persuaded his master to get Hsi Shih drunk to see if she would betray the plan the shrewd old counsellor suspected. It is said, moreover, that she did betray herself, but that the royal lover was so befuddled by her eyes and smile and enchanting witchery that he never understood what the wine had made her tell.

So began the undermining of the state of Wu. The King spent his days and nights dallying with Hsi Shih, who sang and danced for him, played the flute, and recited poems to the man who now lived only for her. Like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, she made hungry where she most satisfied. Fu Chai could no longer be bothered with government, and the control of affairs passed into the hands of his corrupt prime minister who had already accepted bribes from the State of Yueh.

The immortal wine-sodden poet Li Po was to tell, more than a thousand years later, of Fu Chai's new interests.

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'The Prince of Wu is feasting on the Kusu Terrace.
Hsi Shih, his Queen, dances flushed with wine;
She is fair and unresisting.
Now, smiling, she leans near the East Window
On a couch of jade.'⁵

This Kusu Terrace had been built at enormous cost especially for Hsi Shih.

This was only the beginning of the buildings and parks that were built to satisfy the whims of a woman who saw her mission in the enemy's camp as mapped out for her on the charts of Heaven. In the parks Hsi Shih would go fishing, and sometimes as she walked along beautiful birds would perch on her shoulder.

There were bitter murmurings among the people when Fu Chai built, on a hill outside the capital, the Palace of Beautiful Women. There were still more murmurings against the oppressive rule of the prime minister who, while his master sported with his concubine, accumulated vast personal wealth and ruled the people with an iron hand. Counsellor Wu Tzu-hsu, the only honest man in the kingdom, begged the King to take control again before it was too late. His pleas, as before, went unheeded.

The King was not satisfied with his latest palatial extravaganza. He followed this by commanding his architects to build the Colonnade of Musical Shoes on an adjoining site where Hsi Shih had once danced. This has been described as a floor of white marble laid on top of thousands of earthenware jars. 'Beneath this was a hollow cavity fifteen feet deep, which resounded with a ringing melodious sound like the chiming of bells whenever Hsi Shih trod on it. To prevent her from slipping, the marble floor was cut and embossed with dragons and phoenixes.'⁶ Moreover, Hsi Shih wore special hardwood shoes which gave forth musical notes as she danced.

But Hsi Shih grew tired of dancing; the King had to find



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other expensive ways of keeping this archetype of 'gold-diggers' amused. He built a private bathing pool, on the edge of which was a pavilion filled with every kind of toilet requisite: the cosmetics were stored in jars of pure jade; the combs were made of ivory and set in gold. Then followed a Moon Terrace, a Hall of Musical Harmony, a park filled with birds and tame animals.

Some say that three quarters of the state's resources were spent to keep the enchanting smile on Hsi Shih's face or the still more bewitching frown on her brow. But mindful always of her secret mission, the King's favourite tired of every novelty and called for still more ingenious delights.

Yet now and again her true nature would out, as when she distributed food and money to the poor, or when she gave some flowers to peasant women and told them to plant them in their gardens to remind them of her when she had gone from them.

Fu Chai remained devoted to her. Sometimes he took her boating on the Stream of Fragrant Flowers while three hundred girls in transparent robes danced along the marble embankments. He was so happy that he never heard the groans of the people. His consort's smile blinded him to what was happening in the rival state of Yueh.

There, one day, Minister Fan Li received a letter by special messenger from his former pupil, whom he still loved above all other women. 'The Wu state,' Hsi Shih had written, 'is on the brink of destruction. Her treasury is depleted, her army neglected. Her loyal statesmen have abandoned government offices.' This, she urged, was the moment to strike. Only the dispirited Counsellor Wu scented danger; but she would see his lips were sealed.

Fu Chai would have cut off anyone's head to please this Salome who could defeat the last struggles of his weakened will so easily with a kiss. He sent a sword along to Wu Tzu-hsu, who laughed bitterly when he saw it. He told his servants to

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grow trees around his grave since their wood would be useful for the coffins which the country would need when the disaster came. 'After my death,' he added, 'pluck out my eyes and set them over the East Gate so they may see the Yueh forces advance to destroy us.'

In 485 B.C. the glazed eyes of the old patriot saw the army of Fan Li enter the city. The night before their arrival Fu Chai dreamed that a bright star had fallen from the sky, which was a common dream of ill omen in those days. And when the enemy soldiers pushed almost unopposed through the streets of his capital, Fu Chai stood helpless by his toppling throne.

He was given his life by the conquerors; but when he discovered that Hsi Shih had disappeared in the tumult, he wanted only to die, and fell on his sword in the palace where wanton orgies had replaced sound government. Nothing remained, as Li Po wrote,

'. . . but the moon above the river—
The moon that once shone on the fair faces
That smiled in the palace of Wu.'

It might be thought that all would have ended happily, with the exiled Hsi Shih, her duty done, restored to her native land. Her old tutor Fan Li was more enamoured of her than ever; and probably he had every hope of success when he sent a letter to the house where she had hidden, telling of his love for her and asking her to be his wife.

But it was not to be. Hsi Shih could not help remembering the King who had laid his possessions, his kingdom and his very life at her feet. 'I cannot,' she wrote in a farewell letter to Fan Li, 'be so easily forgetful of Fu Chai's rare devotion to me.'

The records say that the peerless Hsi Shih looked for the last time at the reflection of the face that was the envy of the

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moon, and drowned herself in one of the canals of the city she had conquered. But the Chinese have never forgotten her. She is one of the immortal characters of China's history. Whenever, in later centuries, people talked of women whose beauty could overthrow kingdoms and ruin states, they thought above all of the beautiful Hsi Shih, the Cinderella of Chulo.

2



The Builder and the Burner

CH'IN SHIH HUANG-TI

IN a hundred years or so from now, when the rocket-ships carry the brave mortals of this planet on round trips to the moon, we shall be able to discover what truth there is in the belief that the Great Wall of China would be the last bit of man's handiwork to fade from sight if one departed skywards from the earth. Yet without waiting for the judgments of these travellers of the future, it is difficult to dispute that the 'Ten Thousand Li Wall' is the greatest single monument that any would-be Emperor of the World has left behind him. 'Ch'in Shih Huang is gone,' says a Chinese proverb, 'but the Wall still stands.'

Even today it looks solid enough to endure for ever, stretching 1,500 miles from the Eastern Sea to the inner frontiers of Asia. In the centuries that have elapsed since its erection, it has been repaired, strengthened and refaced by scores of rulers, so that it is practically impossible to identify the original brickwork.¹ And in the same way, legend has obscured the life of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti himself.

I forget who it was who decried some of the biographies of the illustrious and eminent Victorians as mausolea of humbug. Certainly in this century we are used to the discovery that public idols have often feet of clay; that the achievements of So and So were in fact the work of two other fellows altogether, whose identities are coming to light through the assiduous efforts of iconoclastic researchers.

In the same way it may be argued that Shih Huang-ti was

only a figurehead, and that most of the important achievements of his reign were really due to his brilliant chief minister Li Ssu, who was some twenty years older than the emperor he served. This is the line taken in Mr Bodde's authoritative work on the period,² while another distinguished sinologue writes the emperor down as 'a very average man without any great gifts'.³

While these interpretations are probably very near the truth of the matter, they should not, I think, be over-emphasized in what purports to be nothing more than a brief popular account for the general reader. It is on Shih Huang-ti himself that the Chinese historians have heaped their abuse, holding him responsible for the cruelties and follies of his reign. Had he been a different kind of man, they argue, these things would not have happened; just as we might claim that the face of Europe would have been different if Voltaire had been hanged as a young man and Rousseau sent to the galleys. Man has not yet, in spite of the economic historians, learned to write history without figureheads and scapegoats; and doubtless Shih Huang-ti was as responsible, in his way, as Hitler was two thousand years after him.

That, anyway, is how the Chinese appear to view the matter. Their unfriendly attitude towards the First Sovereign Emperor is understandable. For he was the burner of the books as well as the builder of the wall, and they have never been able to forgive him for that.

Indeed, their descriptions of him are as unfavourable as Leigh Hunt's description of that tyrannical Upper Master of Christ's Hospital, the Rev. James Boyer. An early historian wrote of the emperor's waspish nose, wolf-like growl and tiger heart before going on to label him as stingy and without grace. There was a story that he had Turkish blood in him—perhaps inherited, if rumour spoke truly, from the beautiful dancing girl who was his mother. A more favourable account reports him as having the pyramidal-shaped head which the

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early Chinese thought desirable—namely, a broad face with the forehead tapering away like a dragon's.⁴

In spite of what—to prejudiced observers and reporters, at least—seems to have been an unprepossessing appearance, Shih Huang-ti was set on making himself emperor over as much of the world as his horsemen and his foot-soldiers could discover. And when he died he left behind him three imperishables: the name 'China', a centralised empire, and the Ten Thousand Li Wall.

In 247 B.C. young Prince Cheng Wang became head of the kingdom of Ch'in.⁵ A succession of able ministers and a powerful army had made the Ch'in state 'the best disciplined and most purposive of any east of the Gobi'.⁶ From the north-west the people of Ch'in had moved into Szechwan and Shensi. Other feudal states were quickly vanquished, and by 221 B.C. the last of Cheng Wang's kingly rivals was subdued.

It was then that Cheng Wang, Prince of Ch'in, proclaimed his new dignity. He was no longer to be regarded as a king among other kings. He was to be known as Huang-ti, the Sovereign Emperor; and since he was the first to bear this title he would be called Shih Huang-ti.

'I am,' he said in his wolfish growl, 'the First Sovereign Emperor. The generations that come after me will call themselves the second generation, the third generation and so on up to ten thousand generations and so on without end.'⁷ The dynasty of world rulers he was founding should 'stretch out to the crack of doom'—as endless as the line of Banquo's successors. Such was his boast. But the dynasty he founded lasted only fifteen years.

It was this desire to make a new beginning and wipe the slate clean, obliterating the memory of the past, that led to the clash with the scholar class and the more brutal aspects of his reign. But there were other clashes too as he did away with the feudal order of society which for eight hundred years

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and more had been the political and social basis of Chinese culture. In its place he created an empire divided into thirty-six administrative districts—later increased by five—under officials appointed by and responsible to the emperor and his chief ministers.

C. P. Fitzgerald reminds us that there have only been two revolutions in Chinese history 'which have radically altered the political and social structure of the state'.⁸ One was the revolution of 1911 which transformed an empire into a republic; the other was this new beginning of Shih Huang-ti's. Today we should want to add a third: the revolution effected by the Communists after World War II.

It was impossible to destroy feudal society in the way the First Emperor destroyed it without making enemies. There was no compensation for rights formerly enjoyed. The great nobles of the provinces were ordered to move to Shensi where they would be under the imperial eye, and their lands were transferred to other hands behind them. It was not surprising that this ruined class should have been bitterly opposed to the idea of the centralised empire, just as the new official class, which derived their livelihood from the change, should have been delighted.

Some who voiced their opposition to the new regime too loudly found themselves part of the huge labour force which had already started work on the First Emperor's ambitious programme of public works. For the master builder needed vast numbers of labourers for the building that seemed necessary to underpin the empire he had created: an empire that stretched—at least in theory—from Korea to Annam, and from the Yellow River to the coastline of Kwangtung.

The Sino-Japanese conflict of the nineteen thirties and forties showed the vital importance of communications in a country the size of China. Roads, railways and navigable waterways were the arteries through which the blood was pumped to keep China alive. The empire Shih Huang-ti built was not so

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large as the present republic, but it was big enough to make roads essential.

Shih Huang-ti built tree-lined trunk roads that radiated out from his capital at Hsienyang⁹ to the frontiers of the empire. These royal roads, which were forbidden to the feet and carts of the common people, are said to have been as much as eighty yards wide, and to have disregarded the hills and valleys in their path.

He made many sensible decrees, as for instance the one ordering a uniform length of axle on the huge-wheeled carts which mules still pull in the Yellow River area. The modern traveller in the loess areas of Shensi and Honan senses the wisdom of this decree as the carts follow, through the muddy canyons in the wind-blown silt, the tracks of the previous vehicle.

The First Emperor ordered too a uniform language for the whole country. Hitherto the great differences between provincial dialects had been encouraged by the feudal divisions. But now, if efficient centralised control was to be established over the whole country, it was essential that this diversity of tongues should make way for a common speech. And so it was decreed. With the speech went a definite and new style of writing.

When taxes were usually paid in kind it was important to ensure that the standards of weights and measures used throughout the empire did not differ among themselves. This too was done by a further decree.

Yet long after these multitudinous decrees have been forgotten, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti will be remembered for his work in linking up the walls in North China which previous rulers had constructed. He set his labour corps to work on a Ten Thousand Li Wall which would keep the Demons out of the empire.

The known superstitiousness of Shih Huang-ti and the ambiguity of the word 'Demons' has led to one particularly

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delightful theory concerning the function of the Great Wall. All over China you can find 'spirit walls'. Sometimes these are inscribed 'The stone dares to withstand', and are adorned with a demon-frightening tiger's head. Inside the courtyards of houses; screening the gates of temples; and inside the main gateways of cities you will find walls which force those entering to turn aside. For evil spirits, though ubiquitous, are forced by their very nature to travel in straight lines; so that a strategically-placed wall provides an insuperable obstacle to these evil-minded visitants. Perhaps, it has been suggested, the Great Wall of China was meant to keep the evil spirits out of the eternal empire. Certainly Shih Huang-ti was superstitious enough to have had such a purpose in mind.

The usual explanation, however, clothes these 'Demons' with flesh and blood. A soothsayer had foretold the First Emperor's destruction by the Huns, who were in these days called the Hsiung-nu or Demons. These terrible people were believed to be able to turn themselves into werewolves whenever they wished, as the savage inhabitants of Volhynia and Lithuania were said to do in the accounts of Herodotus. The Great Wall was built as a bulwark against their invading hordes, and was successful in preventing the wild nomadic cavalry from effecting a lodgment in China proper.

The Great Wall served another purpose besides that of defence: it clearly marked the northern limits of the new empire. The Chinese could now visualize themselves as 'the people within the Wall'. Thus the function of the wall was both to defend the empire and to give the people of China a sense of unity they had not possessed before.

In olden times the Great Wall was known as the Red Rampart, because of the great army whose blood mingled with the mortar during its construction. How many, no one knows. But in its length of 1,500 miles—2,500 miles if you measure all its loops and twists—the bodies of hundreds of thousands were buried. Some were soldiers; some were convicts; some

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were judges and nobles and stubborn disobedient scholars. They were the coolies who built the Red Rampart, and made it the longest cemetery in the world.

There is indeed a tradition that the First Emperor deliberately set out to bury a million men inside the wall. 'If he could bury a million men in it, it would endure first for a million years; then the million spirits which had attained their freedom would watch and guard the mighty barrier against the evil spirits from the north, and against any earthly enemy. But great as he was, he did not care to destroy so many people. . . . So instead of taking a million separate men, he took one man with the cognomen of 'Million' and with suitable ceremonies immolated him to the gods.'¹⁰

W. E. Geil in his book on the Great Wall¹¹ accumulated a number of legends which sought to account for the miracle of the wall by the supernatural powers of the First Emperor. It is related that he rode across the empire on a horse made of white cloud, and every time its hooves stamped the ground a watch-tower sprang up. Others say the horse was coal-black. Others say that the emperor sat astride a dragon.

There are tales of a magic whip which could remove mountains and hold back the rivers. The course the wall takes is said to be that followed by a heavenly horse which was allowed to stray across the land. At least the horse, however frequently it stopped to graze, is not likely to have taken so long to trace the route of the wall as the tortoise which, on the recommendations of highly skilled geomancers—was allowed to demonstrate just what course the rebuilt Ch'engt'u city wall was to follow!

Yet to us, living in a world that is prosaic enough to relegate magic to the Christmas stage, the Great Wall is a monument to the back-breaking labour of unwilling people, not to the supernatural powers of the empire-builder. We can more easily credit the legend that the labourers worked so long that grass began to grow in the dust on their heads, and that they were buried when they fell asleep.

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Such, too, is the way the descendants of the Wall builders regard its brickwork; they have never ceased to heap curses on the Ch'in Emperor.

Concerning Shih Huang-ti's cruelty, in an age when to be powerful meant to be ruthless, there can be little dispute. Rumour has it that one of the first acts of the young prince on gaining power was to bury his grandparents alive because they had been unkind to him. Yet if we are to believe what early Chinese writers have put on record about the barbarous behaviour of the Ch'in state, such an action need not surprise us. The Ch'ins were reported to know nothing about the proper relationships governing men and women, and were prepared, if they felt like it, to treat relatives as casually as they would treat their animals. The Chinese, brought up in the Confucian tradition, were horrified to know that in the state of Ch'in the 'young and robust ate the best of food, while the aged ate what was left. They valued the robust and strong, and contemned the aged and infirm.'¹²

When, following the advice given by the powerful minister Li Ssu, Shih Huang-ti set his face against the tradition-encrusted scholars, his cruelty was given a new outlet. A Han dynasty scholar, who talked with people who had lived under the benevolent rule of the First Emperor, told of the great multitude of the condemned, and of the long processions of the tortured and mutilated who trod the roads on their way to labour camps or exile.¹³ Perhaps the more fortunate among those who opposed him were the scholars who were tattooed on the face like any common criminal and sent to work on the Great Wall.

A less fortunate five hundred were—according to a source which has since been vehemently denied by others¹⁴—buried alive. A still more gruesome story suggests that the heads were left projecting above the ground and run over again and again with a farm harrow.

The crime of these men was a serious one in any one-party state. They doubted the wisdom of the First Emperor's decree

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relating to the destruction of the classics, and were in effect saying that they knew better than he did what was good. They remembered the past and, like the almost extinct race of liberals in George Orwell's *1984*, they used what they remembered to judge what they saw going on around them. Had not Mencius said that the sages of old would not have committed a single unrighteous act even to win an empire?

When Shih Huang-ti had conquered the other feudal states and brought them into his Ch'in empire, he had all the weapons of the feudal retainers collected up and brought to the capital at Hsienyang. There he had them cast—not into ploughshares, but into great bells and a dozen monstrous images which were reputed to weigh sixty tons apiece. There were other great works, too, in bronze and gold which, like the fantastic palace he built, were to be perpetual reminders of his greatness. Thus, perhaps inevitably, this Chinese Ozymandias objected to having scholars around his court who criticised him for violating those ways of simple virtuous living enjoined on emperors by the classics; scholars who spoke in terms which suggested that the history of China had not in fact begun with the reign of the First Emperor of Ch'in.

Li Ssu, capable and ruthless, had for long been the protagonist of revolutionary change, opposing the conservative group of Confucianists led by Wang Kuan. Li Ssu wanted a strong centralised empire ruled by a strong emperor advised by himself, and for the time being he had his way. 'Your Majesty,' he said, 'is the first to accomplish a great achievement. He has founded a glory which will endure for ten thousand ages. This is what narrow scholars cannot understand.'¹⁵

The minister demanded that all the official records, except those of the victorious state of Ch'in, should be burned. The classical *Book of Poetry* and *Book of History* were to be destroyed together with the books put out by the numerous schools of philosophy. Only those tomes dealing with fortune-telling and astrology, medicine and pharmacy, agriculture and arbori-

culture were to be spared; plus such of the classics as were in the possession of 'scholars of wide learning'. This latter proviso ensured that works which were preserved through the holocaust should be kept under government control in the official libraries, and not be allowed to get into the hands of meddlesome critics.¹⁶

The penalties for seeking to evade the decree were, as always, harsh. Scholars who dared to discuss the classical books among themselves were to be slaughtered, and their dead bodies were to be exposed in the market-place. Those who appealed to the past to abuse the present were to be slain with their entire kindred. Officials who connived at any breach of this regulation were to incur the same punishment. Those who failed to surrender the proscribed books for burning within thirty days of the decree's being promulgated were to be branded and transported with shaven heads and iron rings about their necks to the frontier. Here they would keep watch for attackers in the daytime, and at night labour on the building of the wall.¹⁷

Li Ssu's proposals were music to Shih Huang-ti. To him it was fitting that his people—whom he dismissed contemptuously as the 'black-heads'—should be kept ignorant. The proposals became law—a vicious law which Chinese historians have never forgotten or forgiven. The bulky tablets of bamboo—for such were the books of those days—were taken in cart-loads to the flames.

Yet modern research has shown that the burning was far from complete. Many books were hidden; and Chinese scholars who from infancy had been familiar with the great classics preserved them on the tablets of their memory, as in another culture Milton knew his Bible and Macaulay remembered just about everything he had ever read.

While his officials were destroying the records of the past and his long-suffering people were working on the wall, Shih Huang-ti was either travelling through the empire on tours of

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inspection or enjoying himself as best he could in his great capital of Hsienyang, which was to be utterly destroyed in the wars that brought this eternal dynasty to an end.

If luxury could have made him happy Shih Huang-ti would have been a happy man. No less than 700,000 convicts had been required to build the gorgeous A-fang Palace outside Hsienyang on the banks of the River Wei. One of the T'ang poets wrote a long poem about this palace, in the course of which he commented that 'the people of Ch'in were too occupied to have the opportunity of voicing their lamentations; therefore later generations lamented them'.¹⁸ Besides this palace there were over two hundred other royal buildings, where the most beautiful women in the empire lived in the midst of luxurious furnishings. Many of these buildings were replicas of the old feudal palaces in cities that had been conquered by the Ch'in armies.

But the superstitious First Emperor still had his worries. He had been told by one of his magicians who had sought the mushroom-like plant¹⁹ which would confer immortality that evil influences were at work impeding its discovery. The emperor could, however, help the search by taking care to obey the mystic rules of the spirit world and keep the precise whereabouts of his sacred person secret from his subjects. Thus Shih Huang-ti never spent successive nights in the same palace. He moved with anxious haste from the bedroom of one favourite charmer to that of another, and never let it be known in advance—save to a few trusted eunuchs—where he was going to spend the night. The security arrangements of a dictator gave a good deal of trouble even in those days!

Shih Huang-ti had a great fear of omens, and he could not build a wall to shut out his fear. When, for instance, in 211 a great meteorite fell to earth, someone was rash enough to engrave on it characters to the effect that the country would be divided after the First Emperor's death. The enraged emperor had the meteorite destroyed and the population in the

area slaughtered. Shih Huang-ti could not bear to think about death. His alchemists were kept busy concocting elixirs that did not work; his sailors had crossed the seas to seek the Fortunate Isles where there was no death. Perhaps they found them, for they never returned to the country where death, in its more unpleasant forms, was the lot of so many!

After he had occupied the throne of the empire he had founded for twelve eventful years, Ch'in Shih Huang-ti died suddenly. In 209 he was on one of his regular inspection trips in Shantung and Chihli when he was taken ill and died.

The first reaction of his ministers was one of alarm. There was good reason for this. Shih Huang-ti's heir appears to have had more sense than his father: at any rate, he had protested against Li Ssu's proposals on book-burning, and had, in consequence, been banished to serve with the northern army guarding the Great Wall. Li Ssu and the chief eunuchs had cause to fear that their day of reckoning would come if the banished prince succeeded to the throne. And he would succeed if the news of Shih Huang-ti's death leaked out. Therefore he must not know.

Today we are used to hush-hush security arrangements and all the other secret 'goings-on' of twentieth century diplomacy. But we could have taught Li Ssu little.

The death was kept secret even from the retinue. Only Li Ssu and five or six eunuchs (who alone had direct contact with the First Emperor anyway) knew their ruler had died. Immediately a sealed decree was sent to Shih Huang-ti's heir, ordering him to commit suicide. This the obedient son did, not realising his father was already dead and fearing worse than death if he stayed alive.

Meanwhile the imperial entourage set off back to the capital, the dead body of Shih Huang-ti hidden among the baggage. But death, like truth, was inclined to out. The strong smell given off by the corpse in the heat of a Central China summer aroused suspicions among members of the entourage. However, with great presence of mind, Li Ssu bought large quantities of stale

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fish and piled them on a cart following after the royal chariot. The fishy smell concealed the odour of bodily decay, and kept the secret safe until the procession was safely back in the capital.

Here, Li Ssu quickly put Shih Huang-ti's second son on the empty throne. He was, needless to say, a young man of little experience who was glad to let Li Ssu and the eunuchs take over the affairs of state.

The tomb of the First Sovereign Emperor could be no ordinary tomb. It was an underground palace designed to last, like the dynasty itself, to the bounds of time.

The builders had begun work on it in 212 B.C. It was dug out of a mountain some thirty miles from Hsienyang and, according to the history of Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the palatial tomb measured 2,500 ft. from east to west, and 500 ft. from north to south. Ten thousand people could have been seated therein.

The great coffin was shaped like a boat and floated on a river of quicksilver. The roof of the tomb was studded with stars which reflected the flames from the huge candles of seals' fat which were intended to burn for ever. It is said that cunningly made bows and catapults guarded the coffin and threatened despoilers with sudden death.

And over all this splendour was heaped a huge mound of earth which was carried by a sixteen-mile long chain of soldiers from the Yellow River, that great stream which was thought to be part of the Milky Way. The tomb-builders and craftsmen and hundreds of frightened concubines²⁰ were walled up with the dead First Emperor. Over the tomb the green grass has been growing for two thousand years.

Today the tomb cannot be identified. In the country around Ch'angan the modern traveller can see the great pyramidal mounds which are among the oldest of China's monuments. Shih Huang-ti's is among them somewhere.

Perhaps, in some great dark hollow of the earth where the candles have stopped burning, the booby-traps still await the first intruder.

3



Wu and the Wizards of Han

WU TI

THAT more things exist in heaven and earth than many of our philosophies admit is one of those probabilities which more tolerant minds will readily allow. For some of the world's simpler peoples there is no rigid barrier between the world of dreams and the world of flesh and blood. Ghosties and goblins and strange things that go bump in the night feature in their prayers and haunt the mysterious world about them. And even among the more sophisticated peoples of the earth, some are in touch or nearly in touch with an enchanted heaven.

In ancient China, too, there were those who scaled the heavenly heights and became *hsien* or immortals; and thus opened up enchanting possibilities to those who believed they were the stuff of which the gods are made.

The Chinese character *hsien* is composed of the characters for 'man' and 'mountain', denoting the idea that the immortals were for the most part secluded hermits living among the hills. People visualized them as 'wrinkled and white-bearded, with high-crowned caps, and knotted staves, dwelling in caves or hollow trees; datelessly old, full of weird wisdom, yet capable of superhuman activity and by no means devoid of a certain goblin humour'.¹ Inevitably, once immortals were known to exist, there grew up a professional class of middlemen to sell the secrets of immortality to those like emperors who could pay handsomely for them. These middlemen were popularly known as wizards or magicians, and were sometimes even confused with the sages themselves.

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It is probably true to say that, in the whole of Chinese history, the wizards never waxed so prosperous as they did at the court of Han Wu Ti during the latter part of that emperor's long reign. They mumbled their way through the streets and palace courtyards. That so often their prosperity was ended by the executioner's sword was merely one of those risks pertaining to the profession of magic in olden days which no insurance company would have covered. Certainly magicians, spell-weavers, shamans and geomancers were never lacking in the entourage of an emperor who, like Owen Glendower, thought he could 'call spirits from the vasty deep', was acquainted with the immortals, and even wrote love letters—which were carried by tiny blue birds—to the Queen of the Western Heaven herself.

Yet there was more than one facet to the personality of the Emperor Wu. If, towards the end of his life, his belief in supernatural powers which could be released by those who knew their secrets led him to acts which were brutal and horrible in the extreme, it must be remembered that he was not always like that. The demons that haunted him took possession of a mind and body that had once belonged to Wu the Brave.

For Wu, the grandson of Emperor Wen the Benevolent—an emperor who has remained for the Chinese a shining example of the Sage Ruler—not only tried to push out beyond the frontiers of the natural, but spent the savings effected during the reigns of his father and grandfather on territorial conquests which enlarged still further the size of the empire that Shih Huang-ti had established a century earlier.

Perhaps the word 'empire' is confusing. At this time what C. P. Fitzgerald has called 'the centre of gravity'² in the empire was in the great plain between the Yangtse and the Yellow Rivers. Though Wu Ti and his successors in the Han dynasty were to extend their rule from Mongolia and Central Asia to Korea and Annam, these areas were controlled by

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naked force and never became integrated into China proper.

Wu was under sixteen when he ascended the throne; and young men want something more active to occupy their time than the weaving of spells and the muttering of incantations. That activity he discovered, above all, on the north-western frontiers of the empire, where the Hsiung-nu, under leaders of great ruthlessness, were successfully attacking the Chinese towns and villages in the Yellow River plain. They broke through the Great Wall, attacked and defeated the Chinese armies, and made peace on terms that had long been a source of humiliation to the Chinese.

The Emperor Wu stopped all this. He checked the inroads of these Mongolian nomads who have, since the identification was first made by De Guignes in the eighteenth century, been identified by many scholars with those Huns who invaded Europe in later centuries.³ It has even been suggested that the success of the Chinese campaigns against the Hsiung-nu during Wu's reign finally determined these Central Asian hordes to seek an outlet in Europe rather than in the East. Wu and his brilliant generals made Mongolia too hot to hold them.

Those who enjoy speculating about the 'ifs' of history can redraft for themselves the history of Europe on the assumption that the Emperor Wu had never bothered to make the Chinese power felt beyond the Great Wall.

In 138 B.C., two years after Wu became emperor, he initiated a search throughout the land for talented men to lead his armies and go as ambassadors to neighbouring kingdoms. Many remarkable people came forward.

Among those who applied for office was Tung-fang So, who sent forward his application in terms which must be the envy of any modern applicant for a job. 'I am now,' he wrote, '22 years of age. I am nine feet three inches in height. My eyes are like swinging pearls, my teeth like a row of shells. I am as brave as Meng Pen, as prompt as Ch'ing Chi, as pure as Pao Shu-ya, and as devoted as Wei Sheng. I consider myself fit to

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be a high officer of State; and with my life in my hand I await your Majesty's reply.'⁴ There was no false modesty about Tung-fang So. And what is more, he got his job!

There was, too, the traveller Chang Ch'ien who sought an overland route from the Yangtse to India and Ferghana where the famous blood-sweating horses were bred.⁵ His journeys beyond the Jade Gate and the western margins of the empire gave the Chinese court new knowledge of the potentialities of their power. 'It was he,' writes Sir Aurel Stein, 'who first revealed to the Chinese the existence of great civilized populations beyond the ring of barbarous tribes by whom all their land frontiers were hemmed in.'⁶ Chang Ch'ien returned like Columbus to the throne room of the Kings of Aragon, a discoverer of new lands and new peoples. Among the legends that grew up around this great traveller was the tale that he had sailed on a log down the Milky Way.

Many of Wu Ti's great generals came from the border regions of the west. 'Men who had herded sheep and tended horses from boyhood, and perhaps knew the Hsiung-nu language, had a natural advantage', as Owen Lattimore points out. 'They knew how to fight the Hsiung-nu and were familiar with the technique of leading troops out into the steppe, away from fixed bases, which favoured their success and promotion during a generation of warfare.'⁷

General Wei Ching, perhaps the greatest soldier of them all, was a shepherd in his youth. His nephew, Ho Chu-ping, was a cavalry leader of uncommon merit. Pan Ku in his *Annals* tells of one of Ho's battles with the 'Worthy King of the East' in which Ho 'cut off heads and captured prisoners to the number of more than seventy thousand'.⁸

These were the kind of men who went out and defeated the Huns on their own hunting grounds. There were others too who by 130 B.C. had brought the tribal peoples of Yunnan to subjection.

For the many remarkable men who served him, Wu Ti

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created a new title, and lauded the 'meritorious and brilliant in the imperial favour'. As for those who displeased him, they seldom lived to displease him again.

It was in his younger days that Wu himself had earned the nickname of the Martial Emperor. He had led his own troops beyond the Great Wall and sent the Hsiung-nu a challenge to battle which they were too wise to accept. The Chinese who sought to dodge their calling-up and those who sought to evade the taxes levied to finance Wu Ti's war of attrition found life a risky affair. Many were degraded; others disappeared. The cost of maintaining the Empire and its defending armies could not be met alone from the tribute which poured in from the vassal states.

Yet this brief account of the Emperor Wu is not intended to detail his military triumphs. Our interest is more in the way this resourceful ruler dabbled in the magical and black arts and was fooled and befuddled by phoney magicians.

In Pan Ku's *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, there is the following entry against the year 113 B.C.: 'In the summer, the magician Luan Ta was enfeoffed as the Marquis of Lo-t'ung, with the rank of a First Class General.'⁹ That laconic sentence of the chronicler conceals the great change that had turned the emperor who had made Confucianism the official philosophy on which the government of China was to be based into a doubting Taoist seeking the elixir of life.

De Groot reminds us that longevity seeking was 'firmly established as a system before the rise of the House of Han. It reached its height in the epoch when this house swayed the empire. Famous scholars and statesmen were then devotees of it; learned men wrote on the subject.' It was believed that men who had in a certain way 'fed and refined their constitutions for a number of years could, without dying, transmigrate into another existence and could thus become men of reality, immortals, either terrestrial or celestial, according to the degree of divinity they had reached'.¹⁰

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This, like ages long after it, was a superstitious age. In a world wherein so much was unexplained, the natural and the miraculous lived side by side. A Chinese was brought up among traditions of fairies and immortal spirits that had come down to him from the earliest memories of the race. They gave colour and comfort and warmth to the mystical beliefs of Taoism. One could believe in all sorts of impossible things, which might not be impossible after all.

Was there not a huge rabbit living in the moon pounding away at the powder of immortality in a great crater there? Did not hermit sages in the mountains grow herbs that prolonged their lives indefinitely? Were not the choice peaches of immortality to be found in the heavenly garden of Hsi Wang Mu? Were there not islands in the sea where people never died?

All this and more of the same kind was common knowledge in the China of Wu Ti. Court and countryside alike shared the great illusion.

Centuries later, the search for the elixir still went on; even though some of the scholars were growing sceptical. In the early part of the ninth century Po Chu-i was satirizing the so-called Taoist immortals; but he too dabbled in the chemical art. A statesman of this same period was even more emphatic than Po Chu-i about this immortality nonsense. 'Of late years,' he wrote, 'the court has been overrun by a host of "professors" who profess to have the secret of immortality. Now supposing that such beings as immortals really did exist—would they not be likely to hide themselves in deep mountain recesses, far from the ken of man?'¹¹ P'ei Lin went on to suggest that the medicines of these professors, which they urged on the emperor morning, noon and night, were more likely to shorten life than to lengthen it. He urged that the professors should be compelled to swallow their own medicines to prove their inefficacy.

No man ever desired to become an immortal more earnest-

ly than Wu Ti. He was conscious all the time that the secret was almost within his reach; for there were such persons, and he had met them himself. Ko Hung, writing some four or five centuries later, tells of such a meeting during one of Wu Ti's hunting expeditions.

By the roadside the emperor saw an old man gardening—and no ordinary man at that, for a bright halo shone about his head. As Wu Ti moved closer to him he noticed the softness and freshness of his skin. Since this was clearly unusual, the emperor began to ask the man questions about his age. 'When I was 85 years old,' he answered, 'my body was decaying fast and death was at hand; my hair was white and my teeth were gone.' Then he had met a Taoist who told him to eat nothing but a certain root and drink nothing but water. 'I practised this regimen, and lo! my age was turned to youth; black hair grew again on my head, new teeth filled the place of those that had gone. . . . Your servant has now reached the age of 180.'¹²

Although he is reported to have paid the old man generously for the magical prescription, it does not seem to have worked on the body of the Son of Heaven, since for the rest of his life the Emperor Wu was always ready to open the public purse to the wizards who offered to reveal the self-same mystery to him.

Perhaps the earliest of these men in his employ was a certain Li Shao-chun, a native of Ch'i in Shantung—a province which seems to have been a fertile breeding ground of shamans and magicians. He was reported to have learned the art of changing snow into silver and of transmuting cinnabar—the red sulphide of mercury—into pure gold¹³ which, used for the manufacture of eating- and drinking-vessels, prolonged the life of the user. He told Wu Ti that if he lengthened his life in this way he would have a chance to see the Isles of the Blest which Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had sought before him. These were the islands where the herbs of life grew, and where liquid jade

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spouted everlastingly from the rocks—the milk of Taoists who lived for ever. If the emperor could get but a glimpse of these islands, which could sometimes be seen from the sacred summit of T'ai Shan, he would become immortal himself.

Li Shao-chun's own age was a subject of speculation in court circles. He had once, at a banquet, looked at a tottering nonagenarian and remarked, 'I recognize that old man because I saw him as a child going for a walk with his grandfather.'¹⁴ More than once the Emperor Wu questioned Li about his age and was rather anxious to know whether the magician had imparted the secret of immortality to anyone else.

Li Shao-chun was probably being shrewd as well as honest when he said he had not. And he went on to discourse on the nature of the elixir, expounding the common belief of these times 'that certain substances such as jade, pearl, mother-of-pearl, cinnabar, were life-giving, and that if absorbed into the body they would prevent the gradual deteriorations of old age'.¹⁵

This discourse sounded so authoritative that it was a trifle disappointing when Li himself died in the midst of it. Even this did not convince Wu Ti that the magician was an imposter; since the credulous emperor was sure that Shao-chun had merely transformed himself into something else. Astride a great dragon he had probably flown beyond the rim of the earth; or perhaps on the back of a white crane he had gone to visit his friends in the ninth heaven. There were endless possibilities if, like Li Shao-chun, you were an immortal.

The next wizard who appeared at court in 121 B.C. was named Chao Wang. He professed to be a medium, able to communicate with the dead, and his services were especially needed at this time to bring the spirit of the deceased concubine Li Fu-jen in touch with the Emperor Wu, who could not forget her loveliness. Indeed her beauty had led the moping emperor to try his hand at poetry.

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'The sound of her silk skirt has stopped.
On the marble pavement dust grows.
Her empty room is cold and still.
Fallen leaves are piled against the doors.
Longing for that lovely lady
How can I bring my aching heart to rest?'¹⁶

The precise nature of what happened at the seance Chao Wang arranged is never likely to be known to us at this date; but the Emperor Wu must have been satisfied, since the wizard was given the honorific title of 'Master of Learned Perfection'.

Perhaps this went to Chao Wang's head. Titles often have this effect on ordinary men, and he was a magician! Certainly he was expected to live up to his title, and this would have been a strain on a genuine man of wisdom. Chao Wang the charlatan in an attempt to read the oracles of Heaven went a little too far. He started to write the oracles himself to make certain they would appear in suitable form at a suitable time.

The story goes that he made an ox or bull swallow a length of silk on which he had written one of these heavenly decrees. When the Emperor Wu was passing one day, Chao Wang pointed to the animal and prophesied that Heaven was speaking through its entrails.

The animal was killed and opened, and the silk discovered. Unhappily Wu Ti, who was on most occasions no fool, recognized the handwriting. He ordered the servants to be tortured and the truth was twisted out of them. Chao Wang was sent to discover the Heaven where the oracles were really composed.

There must have been a good many in the court circle who found amusement in the pretensions of the miracle-mongers. Few, I imagine, laughed so much as Tung-fang So who, as we have seen, had stated his qualifications so strikingly when putting in for a court post. Since his arrival he had become known as a considerable wit and a prince of good fellows.

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One day, it is said, he drank some of the elixir of life which one of the court alchemists had prepared for the Emperor Wu. The emperor on hearing this was so angry that he ordered his instant execution. Tung-fang So grinned at the angry monarch. 'If the elixir is any good, you cannot harm me. If it's no good at all, I have done no harm.'

Yet he was not only a jester. Had he not journeyed to the North Pole and found there a great mountain which the sun and moon never illumined, and which was lit by a flaming torch held in the jaws of a great blue dragon? Some spoke of him too as an immortal, identifying him with the spirit of a planet which disappeared from the sky while he lived on the earth. And even Wu Ti discovered Tung-fang So's divinity when the Queen Goddess of the Western Heaven came—like the Queen of Sheba to Solomon—to visit him.

Hsi Wang Mu had her court in the K'un Lung Mountains which in olden days were believed to support the sky and to stand in the centre of the universe. The dreams of Taoist dotards had embroidered the age-old fables of Hsi Wang Mu until we can see the details of her palaces and gardens on the Mountain of Many Jewels as vividly as we know the dimensions of the New Jerusalem. Hsi Wang Mu herself was a woman of surpassing beauty; but when she was in a temper, she assumed the tail of a panther and the teeth of a dog and could have out-howled the dreadful Cerberus.

According to the *Private Record of the Emperor Wu*,¹⁷ it was in the year 110 B.C. that Hsi Wang Mu descended to the Han court in a chariot of purple clouds drawn by many-coloured dragons, attended by a retinue riding on dragons and winged horses. The goddess brought her own food with her, and this included a dish of seven peaches grown in her orchard on trees which bore fruit only once every three thousand years.

While she and the Emperor Wu were eating in the Hall of Nine Blossoms, Tung-fang So peeped in at them through one of the windows. The distinguished diners saw him. Said Hsi

Wang Mu: 'This young fellow who is looking through the window has come three times before and stolen these peaches of mine.'¹⁸ After such evidence given by the Queen of Heaven herself, it was difficult to doubt the immortality of Tung-fang So.

Yet it seems that the Queen of Heaven could not have offered to share her peaches with the emperor, for he still went on searching for the elixir.

Reference has already been made to Pan Ku's entry in the year 113 B.C. referring to the great honour paid to Luan Ta, who 'outwizzed' all his predecessors and remained alive for a whole year to enjoy his enfeoffment as Marquis. Luan Ta's meteoric rise to power was one of the most astonishing things to happen during this astonishing reign.

We first hear of him as a court magician to the ruler of Shantung. He was a eunuch, tall and imposing in appearance, and did not hesitate when he finally reached the audience chamber of Wu Ti. He claimed to have actually seen the Fortunate Isles in the Eastern Ocean; but had failed to be received in audience by the immortal beings residing there because he was only magician to a provincial ruler. But he had learned enough, he said, to know that the secret of immortality could be his if he were to go back to those islands as the personal representative of the Dragon Emperor of all China. He must go with wealth and jewels befitting such an ambassador; he must return ennobled in rank and carrying the seals of the imperial authority. Only then would the inhabitants of the Fortunate Isles regard him as worthy of their confidences.

Luan Ta seems to have possessed some conjuring ability as well as a distinguished presence; for within a month or so he had convinced the emperor of his supernatural powers and been created Master Magician of Heaven, Master Magician of Earth, and Marshal of the Divine Way. The emperor considered him a gift from Heaven and rewarded him in proportion.



The magician was given a magnificent palace and a thousand servants to wait on him. When he went out he was carried in a sedan chair and followed by so long a train of attendants that he might have been mistaken for Wu Ti himself. Nor was this all.

Eunuch though he was, he asked and obtained a daughter of the emperor in marriage, together with a handsome dowry. The great nobles and dowagers of the court fêted him; and the wizards in Shantung who learned of his rise to power began to think that the highest honours in the empire might be theirs too, if they practised their conjuring and learned to talk persuasively enough about the Fortunate Isles.

No doubt the newly-created Marquis of Lo-t'ung would have asked nothing better than to remain in his palace basking in the sunshine of the imperial glory. But there was work to be done. The elixir had still to be obtained and the happy isles were a long way off. When Luan Ta eventually bade a reluctant farewell to his sumptuous quarters and set off for the Shantung coast, the baggage train stretched for miles behind the ornate chair in which the wizard was carried. Thus he moved in glory to his death.

For the impatient emperor grew suspicious when Luan Ta did not return with the elixir. The agents he sent after the magician could report no encouraging signs. Towards the end of 112 B.C. the Emperor Wu proved that, though he might be taken in by deceivers, it would never be with impunity. And Luan Ta himself was sent to join the immortals sooner than he wished!

But the Emperor Wu was not cured of his obsession, though he was now more cautious. Encouraged by another Taoist wizard named Kung-sun Ch'ing, who claimed to have seen the footprints made by the mysterious immortals in Shantung, he sought to draw an unmistakable sign from the clouded heavens by sacrificing on the summit of T'ai Shan, the holiest of all the sacred hills of China.

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His was to be no ordinary sacrifice. The *Feng* ceremonial which had been known to men in the golden lost ages of the world was to be performed—that is, as far as possible, since no one really knew what it was.¹⁹ It was so ancient a ritual that its details had been lost. Wu Ti's most learned scholars did not know them, and the Confucianists among them even went so far as to remind their royal master that Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had planned to sacrifice on T'ai Shan, but Heaven had sent him home again with thunder and lightning cracking about his ears.

Wu Ti, however, no longer had any patience with the Confucianism which he himself had done so much to establish on a firm basis. He relied on his wizards to help him recreate the mysterious ritual of *Feng*; and in 110 B.C. he started off on the eight hundred mile journey to T'ai Shan with his servants, his priests, his wizards, and the elephants and rhinoceroses brought from the southern limits of the empire especially for the sacrifices.

At the foot of the mountain he sacrificed to earth. On the summit, over 5,000 ft. above the sea, accompanied by a single servant named Huo Shan—who conveniently did not live to describe what happened—the Emperor Wu performed the ritual he and his wizards had elaborated, and turned his eyes eastwards for the promised glimpse of the Fortunate Isles.

On his return to the waiting throng, Wu Ti was strangely reticent about what had happened; while the great stone he caused to be erected on the summit had one of those inscriptions that are so conventional that no meaning at all could be wrung from it by the curious. The strictest Confucianist could have found nothing wrong with the modest account engraved upon the stone. Whether it meant anything or not, it was appropriate, and that was all that mattered.

If Wu Ti had been under the spell of magic for most of his life, it was black magic that gripped him during his last years. The wizards became sinister sorcerers. The gods he sought

were metamorphosed into demons that haunted his dreams and plunged into nightmares his befuddled brain. His palace at Ch'angan was their home.

And yet he had built it and furnished it for the immortal beings themselves. His religious advisers had told him that unless he made his court look like the Western Heaven the gods would never leave their home to visit him. The heaven Wu Ti built is said to have occupied ten square miles.

There was a great Terrace of the Gods decorated with clouds and stars, and there were innumerable pavilions for the attendant spirits of the divine ones. There were pavilions of cassia wood which scented the very breezes. The door screens of the Pavilion for the Reception of Angels were cunningly woven with the feathers of kingfishers and the hair of the fabulous unicorn itself. On all sides, wonderfully decorated towers thrust skywards invitingly, tempting the heavenly ones down to earth.

Such was the heaven that the brooding fear-ridden mind of the mighty Wu Ti turned into a hell. From it the demons escaped in 91 B.C. Pan Ku's comment is, as before, brief and to the point: 'The witchcraft and black-magic case arose.'²⁰

In the middle years of this twentieth century witch-hunts have become familiar to us again. They stem from fear; and are encouraged by men and women who welcome the chance of sharpening their petty tomahawks on the scalps of those who look at life differently from the way they look at it themselves. Witch-hunts are easier to start than to stop; for once the hunt is on the blood is up, and human hounds have not even the discipline of their canine counterparts. Besides, there is always new evidence being unearthed to prove the wickedness of the hunted, and to confirm that only a disinterested passion for truth inspires the hunters. 'There is no new thing under the sun' said the Preacher of old; and even if that should be a slight exaggeration, there is certainly nothing new about the witch-hunt.

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The one that ravaged Ch'angan and its environs in 91 B.C. had its origins in Wu Ti's well-known propensity to believe in witches, sorcerers, flying saucers and things that go bump in the night.

At the court, the ladies of the harem had long been numbered among the clientele of local witches, who prescribed for them potions and love-philtres, and doubtless gave aid of the pin-stuck-in-image variety to enable the more jealous concubines to vent their spleen on those they did not like. This was good clean fun, and might have remained so if the Emperor Wu himself had not sought aid from such a sorceress in an attempt to get rid of a persistent illness.

The woman he employed seems to have been successful enough to have convinced the emperor that this *ku* witchcraft controlled the lives of men; and thus inadvertently to have set the stage for the last act of the drama.

The leader of the imperial troops stationed in Ch'angan at this time was a giant warrior named Chiang Ch'ung, the commander of a division of Hsiung-nu mercenaries who had been attracted, by good pay and conditions of service, into the imperial army. Chiang Ch'ung had only one fear: that on Wu Ti's death he would lose his favoured position since he was on bad terms with both the Heir Apparent and that young man's mother. The only way to retain his own position after the emperor's death was to be sure that Wu Ti outlived his son.

Since it seemed unlikely that Wu Ti's charlatans would ever produce the drug that would make their emperor immortal, Chiang concentrated on killing off the Heir. He would institute a witch-hunt with the Heir Apparent and his mother as the victims. There is nothing so very novel about the frame-up!

Already, from an imprisoned noble, who had decided that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb and set about doing as much damage as he could by implicating all and sundry, the terrified Wu Ti had become convinced that witch-

craft was being used against his royal person. Thus, when Chiang Ch'ung came to him telling of fifth columnists actively engaged in the black art within the palace walls themselves, he readily sanctioned an exhaustive enquiry into what was going on. No one could have been better pleased than the imprisoned noble. Had he not said that 'there will not be bamboo enough in the southern mountains to write the accusations on—nor will the Yie valley supply wood enough for the handcuffs I shall cause to be made' ?²¹

In ancient China, torture was not so much regarded as a punishment for guilt as a stimulus to the memory, and was commonly used as a routine aid in the enquiry stage. It had this advantage—of which its modern practitioners have long been aware—that if it were severe enough and continued for long enough, any kind of evidence could be extracted from its victims. In this particular instance, the evidence which hot tongs and roasting managed to extort, combined with the sniffings and snufflings of the sorcerers and shamans as they manufactured phenomena to confirm what had been established by the now grievously injured witnesses, was more than sufficient to convince Wu Ti that a *prima facie* case existed for the investigation to be carried on inside the palace of his Heir.

Inside the palace where the Heir Apparent and his mother resided, the evidence secured by the sorcerers was of the most damning kind—inevitably so, since nothing else would have been of any use. In the Heir's quarters a wooden doll of the type used in witchcraft was supposedly dug out of the ground; while the main audience chamber was discovered to be full of evil influences directed against the Emperor Wu. Then, lest there should be anyone sufficiently prejudiced to doubt this evidence, papers were unearthed proving that the prince was plotting with witches and sorcerers to overturn his father's throne.

It is a sad comment on the relations between father and son that the prince, when advised of these 'discoveries', decided

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they were unanswerable. His innocence would never be believed. History had known too many plots against the Dragon Throne; and the Emperor Wu, who had a volcanic temper and whose sleepless nights were spent brooding over sorcerers' spells and combating imagined plots, was not likely to be convinced that his son was guiltless of conspiracy.

The Heir Apparent acted swiftly. After an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap Chiang Ch'ung whom he recognized as the arch-trouble-maker, he was forced into rebellion. He sent his troops to seize the Imperial Arsenal. In the fighting Chiang Ch'ung was captured and executed together with the rabble of sorcerers who had contributed to the tragedy.

Unhappily, in the meantime Wu Ti had been told the Chiang Ch'ung version of what had happened. This drove him nearly out of his mind; but he was still determined enough to move with his regular troops against the small force led by his son. For five days the streets of Ch'angan were transformed into a charnel-house. The prince freed the prisoners in the jails and was aided by many who had been revolted by the blind folly of his father and the cruelty and stupidity of the witch-hunt.

But the big battalions were against him. Maybe too his heart was not in the struggle which had been forced on him by the senile stupidity of a great ruler who was still his father. One night he fled from the city; and not long afterwards the prince hanged himself.

His mother the Empress Wei committed suicide in her palace. The executioners worked overtime as Wu Ti sought to eradicate everybody who might have been involved in the witchcraft which, for five days, had made a shambles of the City of Lasting Peace. The records put the number of deaths at tens of thousands.

Before he died four years later, Emperor Wu learned the truth. It was too late to make amends. Vengeance alone was his to command. The family of General Chiang Ch'ung was

annihilated to ensure that no one should be left to pray for his spirit in the world to which he had gone.

Then, in his turn, the emperor who had for so long hungered to know the secret of immortal life passed over into that world of spirits which he had vainly sought to know from the other side of the curtain.

Fifteen years after Wu Ti's death, when his great grandson wished to honour his memory, a Confucian scholar vehemently protested against the proposed celebrations. Although, argued the scholar, 'Emperor Wu had repulsed the barbarians and had extended the borders of the empire, he had nevertheless killed many soldiers, had exhausted the wealth and strength of the people, and had been boundlessly extravagant. The empire was bankrupt, the people had become destitute vagabonds, and more than half of them had died. Locusts had risen in great swarms and had bared the earth for several thousand *li*, so that the people had taken to cannibalism and the granaries had not been refilled to this day (72 B.C.) Emperor Wu had done nothing good for the people.'²²

Such, at any rate was a Confucianist viewpoint. Others will pity him—if only because he is now so far away in time that condemnation is purposeless—as a sad, disillusioned old man whose power brought him little happiness. They will remember the words in which, just before his death, he confessed his sins to the assembled court. They are words that remind us of that day centuries later when, on the hill behind the Forbidden City of Peking, the last Ming emperor pinned his last words to the border of his robe and fixed the strangling cord around his neck.

'I have afflicted,' said Wu Ti, 'the people with my follies and cruelties. I repent of the past, but cannot amend it. . . . I have acted madly. I was the toy of dishonest magicians. They deceived me. There are no immortals.'²³

One has the feeling he could have said no more than that.

4



The Sleeping Dragon

CHU-KO LIANG

NO man was ever more feared by his enemies in his lifetime than Chu-ko Liang, and even after his death he frightened away an army.

He was without equal in an age of heroes whose names are more deeply enshrined in the hearts of the Chinese people than the knights of King Arthur's Table in our own. As an administrator his record was a beacon to inspire others. Some said he was a god, and some said he was a demon: they agreed he was a man who overshadowed every other in the world.

On the night he died heaven and earth were said to mourn, and even the moon was dimmed. Tu Fu writing five centuries later recalled his passing in a poem.

'A bright star last night falling from the sky
This message gave, "The Master is no more."
No more in camps shall bold men tramp at his command,
At court no statesman e'er will fill the place he held.'¹

In the year 1774 a tablet bearing his name was placed in the Confucian pantheon; and some years ago I went with a crowd of pilgrims to a temple outside Ch'engtu in Szechwan where he is still worshipped.

Chu-ko Liang was born in A.D. 181, probably in the province of Shantung, though the authorities differ on this point. The son of an official who died while he was still a child, Chu-ko was left in the care of an uncle and brought up in West

China. As a young man he showed signs of literary genius with a particular talent for writing verses, and is also credited with mathematical and mechanical skills that were quite out of the ordinary. He must, too, have been something of an artist; for it is said that, in the days of his renown, when he led an expedition into Yunnan to subdue rebellions there, he used to paint pictures to amuse the savages he met on his journey south. Yet for all his abilities, he was neither thrusting nor ambitious for renown, preferring until he was about forty years of age to live the life of a sage in a little country cottage surrounded by pine woods.

During these years his wisdom ripened, and the fame of Master Sleeping Dragon—as he was commonly called, after a neighbouring range of hills shaped like the curving back of a dragon—spread far and wide until it reached the ears of Liu Pei, whose destiny it was to bring this retiring man into the main stream of Chinese history.

Liu Pei was Prince of Shu in this celebrated period of the Three Kingdoms, which lasted from A.D. 220 to 265. It is he and his companions in arms and their struggle to restore the Han succession which provide perhaps the main *leit-motif* of the popular historical novel by Lo Kwan-chung,² from which the fame of Chu-ko Liang mainly derives. In 221 the Han dynasty broke into three parts—Wei in the north; Wu in the south; and Shu in western China. The rulers of all three states claimed the legitimate succession.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms tells of the wars between these states, the deeds of doughty warriors, the archery contests of Chinese Robin Hoods, and the wiles of great strategists—among whom Master Sleeping Dragon was unquestionably supreme.

When Liu Pei, after hearing of 'a man of wonderful skill living about twenty *li* from the city of Hsiangyang', went to seek the help of this sage in restoring the former glory of the Hans, he was twice disappointed. The sage was out. *San ku mao*

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lu comment the Chinese: he 'three times visited the thatched hovel' before he was lucky enough to find its occupant at home. On the last visit, the prince was confronted by a man of slightly below medium height with a most sensitive face. He wore a long white gown and moved, as the novelist puts it, 'with much dignity as though he were rather more than mortal'; and in conversation with the prince he showed such awareness of the needs of the time that Liu Pei said he felt the joy of a fish regaining its natural element.

At first, Chu-ko Liang was unwilling to leave his rustic retreat for the hurlyburly of the political arena. Only after much pressing did he consent to become Liu Pei's prime minister.

The prince's generals were at the start sceptical about Chu-ko's abilities. These generals were themselves no ordinary men and towered like Goliaths above the rank and file of Liu Pei's army. There was the ex-butcher and wine-seller Chang Fei, with his eighteen foot spear, who was tall and bullet-headed with huge eyes, pointed chin and a bristling moustache. He spoke in a deep bass voice 'and looked as irresistible as a runaway horse'. There was too Kuan Yu—later to be deified as the God of War and also, oddly enough, as the God of Literature. He was a giant and everything about him spoke of his huge strength—even 'his long beard, his dark brown face and deep red lips. He had eyes like a phoenix and fine bushy eyebrows like silkworms.' To battle Kuan Yu carried a great sword named Black Dragon, weighing a hundredweight. He rode the horse Red Hare which was faster than the wind. This illustrious pair of warriors had sworn an oath with Liu Pei to serve the state of Shu and be true comrades as long as they all should live. They were the Musketeers of Shu.

It is no wonder that giants such as these should have doubted that a pallid scholar like Chu-ko Liang could really make any difference to their cause. What use could a sage be, however extraordinary his abilities, to an army fighting for its survival

when he was not strong enough to pull Kuan Yu's sword from its great scabbard? They were soon to find out.

Their scepticism turned to wonder when the new leader trapped the Wei army in a defile, set fire to the surrounding rushes, and watched the soldiers trample each other to death in the effort to escape.

Ts'ao Ts'ao, Prince of Wei, asked one of his wisest counsellors who this Chu-ko Liang was. 'He is,' said the counsellor, 'god and devil combined, the greatest marvel of the age. Compared with him, I am a mere glow-worm spark. He is the glory of the full moon.'

More and more people came to fear Chu-ko's reputation as the campaigns progressed. The rustic sage became the prince of strategists. He enticed the enemy into a deserted city, and when they had entered used fire to make them stampede through the gate where an ambush had been set. Those who escaped stopped to drink and bathe their burned limbs in the river; but Chu-ko had dammed it upstream, and most of the survivors from the ambush were drowned when he unleashed the torrent upon them.

A temporary alliance was made with the forces of Wu; but the commander of the Wu army, Chou Yu, was consumed with jealousy of his redoubtable ally. He put Chu-ko in charge of supplies, and told him to procure a hundred thousand arrows within three days. This was an impossible task under the conditions of those times; and to make quite certain that it was impossible, the Wu commander had ordered the arrow-makers to 'go slow'. The penalty for failing to deliver the arrows was death.

Chu-ko Liang the imperturbable, well aware that this was a plot to get rid of him, got together twenty fast boats which he filled with grass bundles and blue cotton screens. On a foggy night he sailed them downriver to the enemy encampment.

When they arrived off the guarded shore, he had drums beaten to simulate an attack. In the camp the jittery troops

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sprang to their weapons, and from the Wei archers arrows poured like rain into the grass bundles as Chu-ko's fleet sailed to and fro before returning to their own camp. The arrows were collected up and handed to the Wu commander as requested.

But Chou Yu was more frightened than pleased by the achievement of the strategist whose aid he had invoked. 'His methods are incalculable, beyond the ken of god or devil. He cannot be allowed to live to be a danger to our land of Wu.' But Chu-ko had no difficulty in foiling Chou Yu's plots against him, and discomfited the Wu general to the last. On his death-bed Chou Yu was heard to cry out: 'O God, since thou madest me, why didst thou also create Liang?' All his plans and ruses had been anticipated by this dragon who, contrary to his name, never slept.

Fact and legend are interwoven in the story of Chu-ko Liang. He lived in an age when generals consulted astrologers before battles and sought omens in the stars or in the shells of tortoises; in an age when magicians who had learned the secrets of the books of magic hidden on Mount Omei were reputed to know how to sit astride the wind and float over the seas, to go without food for years or eat a thousand sheep at a meal. There was almost nothing these magicians could not do according to the stories that have come down to us. A great ruler once asked a Taoist for a dragon's liver. The magician drew a dragon on a wall of the room, slit its belly open and pulled out the liver. It was as easy as that!

It was thus natural that Chu-ko Liang too should have been credited with unusual powers. When Ts'ao Ts'ao chained his ships together to cross a river, thinking himself protected from Shu fireships by the prevailing wind, Master Sleeping Dragon built the Altar of the Seven Stars on the Nanping Hills and prayed for a change of wind as Joan of Arc prayed before Orleans. A south-east wind sprang up as the armies waited, and the Wei fleet perished in flames as the fireships glided in

among them and fire arrows rained down on their decks. The ships burned so fiercely that the cliffs of the river-side are said to have taken on a reddish colour which they have never lost.

Chu-ko Liang was a strategist, not a warrior. He left the actual discomfiture of the enemy to his redoubtable generals. During the battles he directed, he would be found sipping tea under an umbrella on a convenient hill-top, or sitting very erect in a little four-wheeled carriage, dressed in white with a turban on his head and a feathery fan fluttering gently in his hand.

There were times when his tongue was as potent a weapon as Chang Fei's terrible spear. The rival armies of Shu and Wei were once drawn up outside Loyang. Old Wang Lang was the chief strategist of the Wei army and rode out to parley with the enemy before giving battle, apparently convinced that what he had to say would frighten the Shu forces into yielding.

In the days when armies were of a manageable size and could be drawn up facing one another within the compass of a couple of large fields, it could make or mar a leader's reputation to make a spectacle of himself before the assembled armies; and Wang Lang had on this occasion bitten off more than he could chew. In his reply to Wang's oration, Chu-ko not only castigated the corruption of the Wei court, but made full use of that *argumentum ad hominem* which has always been a major weapon of leaders of men. He even poured scorn on Wang's pass degree at the examinations before summing up as follows: 'Since you are such a false and specious minister you have but to hide your body and cover your head, concern yourself about your belly and your back, but do not come out before the army to rave about the decrees of Heaven. You hoary-headed old fool! You grey-haired rebel!'

It seems that there was such a thing as blood-pressure even in those days; for we learn that Wang Lang fell dead of shame and fury on the spot.



On another occasion Chu-ko Liang wrote a letter to the Wei minister of war who lay sick in camp. It was loaded with insults—'the historians will record your salaries; the people will recount your infamies'. We are told that Ts'ao Chen's wrath grew as he read, and he died that same evening.

There was a delightful casualness about Master Sleeping Dragon's strategy. After Liu Pei had died, bequeathing his young son to his prime minister's care, the Wei leader planned to strike at the Shu capital of Ch'engtu with five armies. Much afraid, the young ruler Chien Hsing went to Chu-ko for advice, and eventually found him in his garden, leaning on a staff and watching the fish in a pond. He was working on a plan to foil the fifth army; he had already turned back the other four by the adroit use of small bodies of troops who confused the none too resolute enemy. 'Your Majesty,' said Chu-ko Liang, 'may set your mind at rest.' Not even Drake on his bowling green could have assumed a greater nonchalance.

I suppose, if one had to pick out a single incident from the exploits of Chu-ko Liang to show the kind of man he was, it would be the time when he turned away an army single-handed before the gates of Hsich'eng. Never did anyone bluff more superbly on an empty hand.

The forces of Wei, now under the command of the famous general Ssu-ma I, had swept aside Chu-ko's troops, whose officers had foolishly tried to improve on the plans of the greatest of strategists. The enemy was nearing the walls of Hsich'eng where Chu-ko was in residence with a mere handful of men. No defence was possible against the army of Ssu-ma I.

Chu-ko Liang saw that one thing alone could save the city from falling into enemy hands—his uncanny reputation as a strategist.

So he opened all the city gates, disguised the few soldiers he had as villagers and set them to work cleaning the streets inside the gates. Then he put on his simple robe and sat on the

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city wall by one of the look-out towers, smiling and lightly fingering his lute. By his side a stick of incense slowly burned.

The scouts of Ssu-ma I's army came within sight of the city. From outside the wall they looked up at the figure of the man on the deserted battlements; the man whose name was feared above all others. They looked in amazement and reported back to their general. He was taking no chances. Fearing an ambush, Ssu-ma I gave the orders to retreat; and his great army turned away from the undefended city and the lute-player sitting on its wall.

Many military inventions are attributed to Master Sleeping Dragon. His experiments in this field reminds one of the wise Archimedes constructing engines of war for Hiero of Syracuse in ancient Sicily or Leonardo da Vinci acting as military engineer to Prince Borgia in Renaissance Italy. Chu-ko seems to have made an early use of gunpowder for signalling to his troops, though not for firing cannon-balls. He used coloured models of great animals—hollow, with men inside, like miniature Trojan horses—with flaming torches jutting from their mouths to terrify the armies of the Mantse king in the campaigns in Burma. He invented a crossbow to fire ten arrows at once. And he is said to have been the inventor of the invaluable wheelbarrow.

Yet it is his tricks and ruses that capture the imagination. He used to advise enemy generals to read up their strategy to make the battle less of a walk-over for him. The campaigns he waged in Burma, for instance, make incredible reading.

Seven times he captured the Mantse king Meng-huo and seven times he released him to lead his forces into battle once more. When his Chinese officers protested at this, Chu-ko replied, 'I can capture him just as easily as I can get something out of my pocket. What I want to do is to overcome and win his heart, so that peace may follow of itself.' Unlike many generals and statesmen of East and West who were to come after him, he was more concerned about winning the peace

than winning the war; for he was well aware that a friendly neighbour in the south would do more to promote the prosperity of the Shu kingdom than the presence of a subjugated enemy. When for the last time the captured Meng-huo fell to his knees before Chu-ko Liang, he said, 'O Minister, you are the majesty of Heaven. We men of the south will offer no more opposition.'

At the age of fifty-two, when encamped with his army near the Wei River preparatory to a final attack on the enemy-capital at Loyang, Chu-ko Liang coughed up blood and read his fate in the stars.

He rose from his sick-bed to make a last inspection of the camp, and returned to his tent to write his testament, saddened by the knowledge that Wei was still unconquered and the Hans still unrestored. He gave orders for his body to be carried back with the army to Ch'engtu.

So Chu-ko Liang died and the Shu army broke camp and retreated. When the Wei forces followed to harry the withdrawal, the Shu leaders did as Chu-ko Liang had bade them. They set up a carved life-size replica of him in the little carriage, dressed in his familiar robe and holding the feather fan, and turned it to face the enemy.

When they saw it the Wei army fled in confusion.

In death, as in life, Master Sleeping Dragon was more than a match for his enemies.

5



The Shady Emperor

YANG TI

IF for the sake of neatness of classification it is thought desirable to subsume the rulers of the earth under one or other of two heads—Good and Bad, then the Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty is damned already by the nickname ‘Shady’ which the Chinese have given him.

Comparatively few Chinese emperors have been so outstandingly good as, say, the Emperor Wen of Han, who put the interests of his people so far ahead of his own that he spent scarcely a penny on the imperial parks and palaces during the whole of his twenty-three-year reign. Nor are the Chinese by any means unconscious of this scarcity of good rulers. One of their wise sayings puts the truth bluntly: *I chih i luan*, meaning that a period of good government is invariably followed by chaos. And in the long period of their history the Chinese have recognized only four desirable *chih*s. The rest of the time government has been unstable—or far worse than that; as it was during the ‘nasty, brutish and short’ reign of Yang Ti.

Yang’s shadiness was apparent from the very beginning, for he had no obvious right to succeed to the Dragon Throne at all. His mother, the empress, encouraged such illicit ambition as he had by pouring into the ears of her husband numerous cunningly devised tales suggesting that the eldest son Yang Yung was not a desirable successor and was evincing far too great an eagerness to step into his father’s imperial shoes. Poor Yang Yung was no match for the duplicity of his mother and brother.

The facts—or rather the appearance of facts—were against him; and it was not difficult to make the better appear the worse.

The Emperor Wen (whose personal name was Yang Chien) did not frequent the pavilions of his concubines to anything like the same extent as certain of his predecessors on the throne. He appeared satisfied with such favours as the empress granted him, though it would seem that this lady exercised more power than charm in the bedchamber. The eldest son, Yang Yung, did not follow this monogamous example. He had a frank liking for the ladies and his mother saw that this was brought to the notice of the disapproving emperor. At the same time she expatiated on the sober and steady qualities of the younger Yang Kuang.

Actually Yang Kuang was even fonder of the ladies than the Heir Apparent, but was more deceitful about his interests. As is so often the case, it was the appearance of things that mattered. In the Sui dynasty *Annals* a delightfully pointed sentence puts his behaviour in a nutshell. 'As to Yang Kuang, whenever he begot sons in the ladies' quarters, he raised none of them, thus showing that he indulged in no extra-marital relations with them.'¹

In these ways Yang Kuang secured a reputation for sober living which he scarcely deserved. Yang Yung was degraded and banished and his brother set in the direct line to the throne.

But Yang Kuang was not content to be the Heir Apparent for a day longer than necessary. When the Emperor Wen fell ill, the dutiful son was a constant visitor to his father's sick room—perhaps because one of the nurses there had taken his fancy. One day he made an assault on her. She escaped him and reported to the emperor. 'The Heir Apparent,' she said in one of those Chinese understatements that might have come from one of Ernest Bramah's Kai Lung novels, 'has shown himself devoid of a sense of propriety.'

Perhaps that formidable plotter the empress was not at hand

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at the time; for it is reported from an unofficial source that the sick emperor began to have doubts about his wisdom in degrading the legitimate heir in favour of the second-born who had tried to rape his nurse. We are told that the emperor sent for Yang Yung in an attempt to undo his folly at the eleventh hour. But the messenger was waylaid by the watchful Yang Kuang, who removed all chance of further communications by putting his own followers in attendance on his father. The sick man did not recover; nor was the banished brother ever seen again.

In the official annals of the Chinese archivists there is no record of any jiggery-pokery. It did not do to cast too much light on the personal qualities of the occupant of the Dragon Throne—at least, not at the time. Yet it was in some such way as I have described that Yang Kuang, Yang the Shady, succeeded to the heritage of his father.

It was a heritage that for nearly four hundred years had been split into factions by warring rulers, some of Tartar stock and some Chinese, each of whom had tried to build an empire on his own petty self-destroying ambitions. This the Emperor Wen had finally succeeded in doing, so initiating the short-lived dynasty of Sui which was to make way, after less than three decades, for the glories of T'ang.

The fact that, largely by his own efforts, he was sole ruler of a country that was once again united probably contributed to the dreams of grandeur which possessed the energetic and ambitious Yang Ti. He might have done much to consolidate his inheritance, for he was not lacking in drive and had ideas on trade. Instead, he dissipated the revenues on extravagances of his own devising, while his people ate the bark and the leaves of the trees.

Yang Ti, as he was borne in splendour along Ch'angan's broad and magnificent Street of Heaven, pictured himself in a more energetic role as a Chinese Napoleon, personally leading a number of expeditions to extend the Chinese power.

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The expeditions were remarkable enough in their own way. There is a story² that while he was on these journeys Yang Ti sought to perpetuate the illusion that he was still in his capital. He did this by commissioning artists—two of whom are said to have been Hindus—to paint an enormously long panorama on silk-faced cloth. This represented in remarkable detail the walls of the capital with its buttresses and gateways, and the temples and rooftops which could be seen beyond it. Beyond these too were the distant hills which Yang Ti loved to watch from the upper verandahs of his palace. The whole panorama was over a mile long and was unwound around the edges of the encampment in the evening.

But Yang Ti's dreams of conquest soon faded. Three times he tried to invade North Korea, whose ruler refused to pay him the homage he considered his due. The first campaign was in 612, and ended when mass desertions from the forces after floggings and executions forced the emperor to return. The next year a second expedition set out, and this time the army was almost denuded of horses by the innumerable bands of robbers which had recruited new members from the previous unsuccessful expedition. The *Sui Annals* tell us that 'those who were strong assembled and became robbers, while those who were weak sold themselves as slaves. . . . New bandits and rebels arose like bees.'³

In this same year 613, eight separate rebellions broke out in different parts of the country, and Yang Ti put them down with great cruelty. In 614 he made his last vain attempt to subdue the Koreans. This time the desertions were beyond counting, though the enraged emperor slaughtered all those who were caught and smeared their blood on his flags.

Then there was his equally abortive attempt to deal with the Eastern Turks, who were making forays against the empire along the line of the Great Wall. Yang Ti only just escaped capture on this occasion. He had to take refuge in the fortress town of Yenmen, upon which the Turkish arrows fell like

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rain, while Yang Ti in a blue funk cried his eyes out. When he got safely back to Loyang he made no further attempts to expand the China frontiers. By this time even he must have suspected that his generalship was not in the highest class.

To build a capital at Loyang was one of Yang Ti's first expensive ideas on succeeding to the throne. His father's capital had been a 'Western Capital' at Ch'angan; but what was good enough for his father in the way of accommodation was not good enough for him. He set the celebrated architect Yang-su to work on building an 'Eastern Capital' at Loyang in Honan, which would have the advantage of being nearer the grain-producing areas.

This was not really a new idea, for as long ago as the eighth century B.C. P'ing Wang, or P'ing the Peaceful as he was often called, had moved his Chou dynasty capital eastwards to Loyang from Fengkiao in fear of the western tribes. Yang Ti, however, had in mind sumptuousness rather than security; and perhaps—who knows?—he found the ghosts of his father and brother walked by night through the Ch'angan apartments.

Two million labourers, all of whom knew what it was to lack the basic essentials of life and whose daily rations did little more than keep their hunger immortal in them, worked at the construction of the buildings that were to enshrine the surplus wealth of an impoverished empire. There was no Ou-yang Hsiu then, as there was four centuries later, to protest against the imperial extravagance.

Ou-yang Hsiu, statesman and scholar, was able to memorialise a Sung emperor as follows: 'I am informed that, in consequence of the recent birth of a princess, a demand has been made on the Treasury for no less than eight thousand pieces of silk.

'Now the rigour of winter is just at its height, and the wretched workmen of the Dyeing Department, forced to break ice before they can get water, will suffer unspeakable hardships in supplying the amount required. And judging by

your Majesty's known sentiments of humanity and thrift, I cannot believe that this wasteful *corvée* is to be imposed, though rumour indeed has it that the dyers are already at work.'⁴

As I have said, there was no one to protest in similar phrases to Yang Ti of Sui over extravagance a thousand times greater; but then this emperor's 'humanity and thrift' were not so well known. The Loyang palaces and parks were only the beginning. Yang Ti was to leave posterity a waterway which would long outlast the groanings of the slaves who built it.

A writer of the following dynasty wrote at length about the splendours of this Eastern Capital of Loyang, with its palaces and botanical gardens, and the great artificial lake studded with islands on which were pavilions and gardens where members of the court could rest. Along the borders of this lake which enjoyed the fanciful name of the Northern Sea were large villas where the emperor's favourite concubines lived. On this lake in 616 mock naval battles were enacted for the pleasure of the court just as they had been in Europe in the flooded arena of the Colosseum in ancient Rome.

The imperial park covered an area of sixty square miles, and when Yang Ti went hunting here beautiful women would accompany his excursions. In this park it was perpetual summer, for when the trees lost their foliage and the flowers withered with the approach of those stern continental winters, coloured silks, shaped into leaves and blossoms were fastened to the bare stems and branches; and the lotuses in the lake had their flowers perpetually renewed.

Doubtless to many minds this opulent vulgarity contrasted badly with the simple way of living followed by those semi-mythological Sage Rulers of old, whose qualities were known to every Confucianist in the land. Long before, Han Fei-tzu had memorialised another throne, reminding its occupant that 'when Yao held the empire, his reception platform was but three feet high, his oak roof-beams were unsmoothed, and

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his reed thatch was not trimmed. Even a travellers' inn could not be more miserable than this. The unhusked kernels of pannicked bread were his food, and the *li* and *huo* plants made his broth. He ate from earthen containers and drank from earthen vases. Were it the nourishment of a gate-keeper, it could not be worse than this.'⁵

But 'Yao' did not happen to be the middle name of Yang Ti of Sui. He was never afraid of being extravagant with money he did nothing to earn.

Of the two million workers who are said to have been employed on the construction of these Loyang delights, nearly half died of the ill-treatment they received. Their corpses were taken away in slow lumbering carts to China's Sorrow, the Yellow River, a few miles away across the loess.

The Eastern Capital was a great success. But why not a Southern Capital too? A capital at Chiangtu or Yangchou on the Yangtse River had obvious advantages. It was in an area where rice was plentiful and famines scarce, unlike the fields of Honan which from time immemorial had suffered from famine and flood. In 583, in the reign of Yang Ti's father, four state granaries had been built in the Yellow River area to keep Ch'angan supplied with rice if either of these twin disasters should occur, and later more granaries were built. Because the Yellow River was virtually useless for river transport, Yang Ti had opened a canal linking Ch'angan with Tungkuan, the fortress city at the great bend of the river. Now he had a far greater project in mind: to open a Grand Canal from Loyang to Chiangtu, which was situated some miles north west of modern Nanking and was an inland port on the great Yangtse estuary.

The Grand Canal is the chief memorial that Emperor Yang the Shady left behind him. Even so, it is a monument to his transient dreams of grandeur. The magnificent trappings disappeared centuries ago: what remains bears a strictly utility label.

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Yang Ti did not, of course, start from scratch. There were small streams and narrow little canals which other people had dug before him, just as his own waterways were to be improved in the course of the following centuries. Yang Ti's main contribution was as grand designer. He planned to build a canal deep enough for grain barges of 800 tons' capacity⁶ to make use of it—and this was a fantastic tonnage for such times. But there were resources enough. He had other people's wealth to burn, and he never cared how hard other people worked or how many died on the job. The tools were the hands and hearts of his people, and the tools were expendable.

The numbers employed were fantastic, even after allowing for Chinese exaggerations. It is reported that over three and a half million men and women were conscripted for the work while fifty thousand of the Emperor's soldiers maintained discipline. Others were compelled to provide food and drink for the labourers. 'The column of men arriving with spades, mattocks and other tools, declares the recorder, stretched for several thousand miles! Their movements at work as they hurried backwards and forwards were "like lightning and hurricane"', and reinforcements sped up "like swarms of bees and ants"'.⁷ Even if there is some licence in this account, the picture is still a graphic one. I have watched conscripted labourers at work on the Burma Road with the same kind of tools. It could not have been all that different in Sui times.

Whatever was surplus above the starvation needs of the people was taxed for the use of those ordained to rule by the Confucian theory of the ruling class. Whatever could not be hidden from the eyes of the tax-collectors was taken to pay for the emperor's vision of an Imperial River.

The Sui *Annals* of 606 list some of the fancy ornamental goods which the Emperor Yang required his people to find in such spare time as they had. 'In general all bone, horn, ivory, hides, hair and feathers which could be used for decorating

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utensils or which were suitable for making hair and feather decorations and pennants were exacted. The requisitions were so urgent that what was ordered in the morning had to be provided by evening.'⁸ Not even the birds could escape the demands of the rapacious tax officials. The emperor's cushions had to be stuffed with the softest down!

Shakespeare tells us that when Cleopatra came sailing down the Nile to meet her Antony 'the very winds were lovesick'. But Yang the Shady, lounging on the cushions of his dragon boat, surrounded by beautiful women, must have looked every bit as impressive as he proceeded down the Grand Canal on the opening day. The fleet accompanying him to Chiangtu was seventy miles long, and the journey was to take two months. His passing too left a wave of perfume in the air.

The descriptions which have come down to us of the fleet of junks can, alas! no longer be checked by the historians. Report has it that the imperial barge itself was nearly 230 feet long and fitted with four decks which turned the boat into a floating palace. There was a throne room and numerous apartments. The two lower decks contained 120 fine cabins to house the emperor's personal attendants, and these cabins were decorated with gold and precious pieces of jade. The prow of the imperial barge was carved to resemble the head of an enormous dragon.

Nine other junks of almost equal magnificence followed Yang Ti's own. One was occupied by the empress and the rest by their suites. Two hundred and fifty 'second class junks' preceded the splendid ten, while a like number followed after. In these were princes, first-rank concubines and a thousand others together with the servants who prepared the food and drink. Then followed thousands of other boats, their magnificence tapering gradually away as their occupants became ever less exalted in rank. In these sat civil and military officials, eunuchs, Buddhist priests and even some ambassadors from other lands.

The first and second class junks were all fitted with silken sails; but when the wind was contrary or failed altogether, the great flotilla was hauled along by the inevitable conscripts.

Eighty thousand coolies who had, for this royal procession, exchanged their torn and dirty cotton robes for garments of brocaded silk hauled these floating palaces by long green ropes, as they plodded along the tow-path which had been dignified by the name of the Imperial Way. Helping the men, we are told, were a few hefty goats which were used for such purposes in Sui times. Beyond the coolies rode mounted horsemen of the imperial guard.

All along the banks, beneath the willows of Sui that had been planted to strengthen and beautify them, stood the plundered villagers who must have watched this display of glorious majesty and conspicuous consumption with mixed feelings. Even the officials of the villages through which the Grand Canal passed must have been more worried than usual, for it had been decreed that they were responsible for the catering arrangements. To feed the emperor and his retinue well was a means to promotion; not to feed him well was a crime that death alone could expiate. Over a hundred and fifty miles from the canal, officials were requisitioning enormous quantities of victuals to feed the gay flotilla.

Passing the emperor and his barges along the Imperial River must have resembled that game played at Christmas and parties, where the object is to get rid of the parcel before the music stops. There can be little doubt that many trembling officials who welcomed the Son of Heaven at their villages did not live long enough to wave him goodbye.

Yet not even the mighty Yang Ti himself was to live much longer. It was clear enough who was lord of the Imperial River; but in other parts of the country it was not so apparent who was in control. The empire was rocking under the buffets of popular indignation at the extravagances of Heaven's representative. The ill-conceived military exploits produced, as has

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been seen, banditry and rebellion. The splendours of the imperial entourage, with the fawning toadies and sycophantic 'yes-men', merely concealed from Yang Ti's own eyes the great cracks which his megalomania had made in the foundations of his power.

During the ill-fated Korean expedition of 613, the emperor was told by a soothsayer to beware of a family by the name of Li which would establish the next imperial line. With Herodian gusto Yang Ti proceeded to execute certain members of the Li clan who were prominent in court circles. Unfortunately for him, the heads of those who were to fulfil the prophecy remained safely on their shoulders.

It is always interesting to speculate about the knowledge the tyrant has of the country he rules. Yang the Shady surrounded himself with 'yes-men' who knew what he wanted to hear and suspected that their own continued existence was conditional on his hearing it. They catered to his whims and left him to his women and his wine. Even in the shadow of the end Yang continued his debauches. An annalist records that a huge cup, holding about seven pints of wine, was constantly at his lips!

Yang Ti learned nothing from the protesting gestures of his people, who were discovering anew the truth of the Confucian adage that oppressive government is more terrible than savage tigers. In their voices he did not, like the Sage Rulers of old, discover the judgments of Heaven.⁹ When a number of the imperial dragon boats were burned in a major rebellion, he ordered new boats to be built. By 616 they were ready; and for the last time the emperor and his sycophants left the Eastern Capital for Chiangtu.

Behind him in T'aiyuan a *coup d'état* was being planned, Li Shih-min being one of the prime instigators together with his weak-willed father Li Yuan, Duke of T'ang. By the second half of the year 617 the Duke's Righteous Army was ready to march south, in a year which saw no fewer than seven usurpers

rallying their followers against Yang Ti in different parts of the empire.

As the Righteous Army moved southwards over the Yellow River to Ch'angan, the Well-watered City, the huge granaries were opened to feed the destitute. The poet Yang Ch'iung wrote: 'The fires of war have lit Ch'angan. No one today is easy in his mind. Horsemen in armour surround the imperial capital; snowflakes lie heavy on the frozen standards. The angry voice of the wind mingles with the drum-beats. And the time has come again when the leader of a hundred soldiers is held in greater esteem than a talented man of letters.'

After a siege of five weeks Ch'angan fell, and the T'ang forces proclaimed Yang Ti as Grand Emperor, the traditional title of a deposed monarch.

We are told that Yang the Shady resigned himself to the loss of the north and tried to consolidate his control over the lower Yangtse. But his courtiers and his troops were sick of him and were less fond of the Southern Capital than their ruler. Yang Ti soon became aware of the discontent of his troops who had been separated for so long from their homes and families. In an attempt to check it, he 'conceived the simple plan of providing them with new families in the south. Orders were given that every soldier must take a wife from a family resident in Yangchou.'¹⁰

Generous though he was in the allocation of other men's daughters, the days of Yang Ti were numbered.

One night in April 618 the few loyal guards remaining were overpowered by mutineers who broke through them into the palace. They took the emperor's favourite son and decapitated him before his father's horrified eyes. Yang Ti's clothes were splashed with the youngster's blood.

But the mutineers did not shed the blood of Emperor Yang the Shady. They strangled him with his own scarf and left his sacred body lying there by his throne.

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Such was the melancholy end of the man who at the height of his power had ruled over an empire stretching from Turk-estan to Indo-China. To his court envoys had come from Japan; and from his capitals ambassadors had set out for the East Indies, India, and Turkestan, and returned with precious Buddhist sutras, asbestos, agate goblets, lion skins and dancing girls.

No one remembered his encouraging the scholars to edit earlier writings and catalogue the great libraries. People forgot that he initiated an examination system which was to last over a thousand years. But they remembered his appetites, even though his 'pleasure domes' did not long survive him as memorials of his misrule. They were burned when Li Shih-min captured Loyang. The boy prince, who was to be the first great emperor of the T'ang dynasty, ordered their destruction as an example to posterity.

And as you look today on the dirty waters of the Grand Canal, you know that from these too have vanished the last memories of the prodigal splendours of the fleet that once, so long ago, floated to Chiangtu.



The Banished Immortal

LI PO

THE jobless intellectual, like the poor, has always been with us.

True, he did not always advertise in the columns of *The New Statesman and Nation* or in those other journals where young graduates make known their all-round gifts and literary aspirations in the hope that some discerning patron somewhere is anxious to grant fulfilment to their dreams. But he has always been aware of possessing talent above the ordinary, and has deemed his non-recognition by the world to be a criticism of humanity's powers of discernment rather than of himself. Often enough he has been right; even when more often still he has been wrong.

Imagine a country where the only fitting profession for the university graduate is the civil service; where almost the sole avenue to advancement is by success in the competitive classical and literary examinations; and where thousands of unknown scholars are spending year after year cramming for the ordeal ahead of them, some of them growing old and despairing but still struggling to gain the higher degrees which will give them a job and bring lasting glories to their families. Such was China for long centuries.

The poets and the prose-writers were for the most part officials, some of whom found themselves in comfortable sinecures about the court, while others were sent to exacting posts in the provinces. In their spare time they wrote verses and letters to their friends, and dreamed the poet's dream of

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a little cottage in the mountains, a stream for fishing nearby, a wine jug perpetually filled, and all the other simple requisites of a blissful retirement when their life's work was over.

Though this was a typical vision of the Chinese intellectual, it has, with slight cultural modifications, captured the imaginations of poets and dreamers in other parts of the world besides China. It contrasts oddly with the urgencies of our own age, with its unceasing clamour for greater production and more pay, and the postponement of leisurely retirement to beyond the gates of death itself.

Everyone knows today that a man cannot live by writing poetry, and that even prose-writers must find subsidiary occupations to enable them to eat. In old China too the poet could not live by his brush—perhaps one of the first men to do so was Li Yung who specialized in epitaphs and memorial inscriptions, and was generously paid for his work¹—even though respect for literature and the scholar class was there widespread. The Chinese poet too was an amateur, and though his verses may have been set to music and sung in the cafés and wine-shops, he drew no royalties. He had to content himself with being immortal, like Li Po and Tu Fu, two of the brightest stars in the great dynasty of T'ang.

It is a comfort to many a young student sitting his Finals to pass in review the famous men known to him who failed their examinations, or who secured at best a pass degree. And I imagine that not a few Chinese examinees, shut in their cells and gnawing at the bamboo ends of their brushes, have remembered these great T'ang songsters who failed to satisfy the examiners in the eighth century A.D. And one of them at least was a former denizen of Heaven!

It was an old civil servant named Ho Chih-chang, a Taoist eccentric who claimed to have personal experience of the Taoist Heaven, who gave Li Po the name of 'Banished Immortal', recognizing him as an angel who had been sent to earth as a punishment for his heavenly misdeeds. But immortal

or not, the Ch'angan examinations—or at any rate the examiners—were too much for him.

The story of Li Po and the examiners is almost certainly too good to be true, which is no doubt the reason why Mr Waley does not relate it in his fascinating little book on *The Poetry and Career of Li Po*.² Yet it is a story that was probably told and believed for centuries, and related with delight by lazy students on drinking parties.

We are told that when the much-travelled Li Po finally came to Ch'angan and met the eccentric Ho Chih-chang, it was with the intention of sitting for the examinations. Ho recognized in the Retired Scholar of the Blue Lotus a kindred spirit. He invited him to an alehouse, drank wine with him until they were both turned out into the street by the innkeeper, and then carried his protégé home. That part of the story, at least, is likely enough.

When he learned that Li Po intended to sit for the examinations, Ho proffered some advice. The two examiners, said Ho, were not likely to be impressed by ability alone. An examinee must have a recommendation if he were to stand any chance of passing.

Ho Chih-chang thus wrote letters of introduction to the examiners; but apparently neglected to forward with them any more valuable or substantial token than his personal regards. Certainly his letters had the effect of making the name of Li Po known to the two gentlemen; but that was to be unfortunate. As one of the examiners is said to have stated: 'On the day of the examination we will remember the name of Li, and any composition by him will be tossed aside without consideration.' And so it was done.

'This scrawler Li is good only to grind my ink,' said the Examiner Yang, throwing the unread paper aside. 'I wouldn't let him do more than help me on with my boots and stockings,' said the equally indignant Examiner Kao. And without more ado the ambitious Li Po was failed.

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But the story would never have been told at all if that had been the end of the matter. One day, not long afterwards, an undecipherable letter arrived at the court of the Emperor Ming Huang. None of the scholars, none of the learned doctors of the Hanlin Academy assembled there, could make head or tail of it. It was then that the venerable Ho mentioned a scholar of remarkable promise who was more likely than anyone else to be able to read this strange script from the kingdom of Po Hai. The scholar's name was, of course, Li Po.

Immediately the Emperor Ming Huang sent for him. The poet, however, demurred. He explained his unworthiness, his lack of both title and degree, and when Ho conveyed these apologies to the emperor he went on to explain how it had come about that Li Po's essay had been rejected by the examiners. Once the way had been paved with explanations, it was not difficult to persuade Li Po to come to the court. He made his obeisance to the emperor in the Hall of the Golden Bells.

When the letter was handed to him, Li Po read it with ease, and, according to the story, the emperor made him a doctor of high rank on the spot. The same night a banquet was given in the poet's honour at the Table of the Seven Jewels. To the food, the women and the wine Li Po did full justice; and the fun went on until the poet had drunk himself into one of his well-known stupors.

The next morning the reply to the letter from the kingdom of Po Hai had to be written; but Li Po was not easily awakened. His faculties were gradually stirred to consciousness with a flagon of wine and a bowl of broth which Ming Huang himself is said to have stirred with chopsticks of the purest ivory. And now the hour of his revenge was at hand!

The poet regarded with disfavour his dishevelled appearance, his dirty boots and stockings splashed with gravy and wine. He asked the emperor if he could attire himself in new boots and stockings, and requested that the crestfallen Examiner Kao should be ordered to help him on with them. And

while Kao was engaged on this menial task, the miserable Yang was given the ink slab and told to make ready the ink.

As I said above, it is one of those 'tables turned' stories which is probably a little too good to be true. Mr Waley is quite emphatic that Li Po never sat for the examinations, possibly because he knew he was unlikely to pass them.³ Yet it is inevitable that a man like Li Po should be obscured behind legends of this sort. When you reflect that this most popular of poets was at the height of his powers when the dying Bede at Jarrow was dictating his English version of the Gospel story to his disciples, you are aware of an interval of time between the then and the now which makes it impossible for us to grasp enough historical certainties to complete the picture.

Li Po was born in Szechwan or farther west still⁴ in the year 701. On the night he was born, his mother dreamed that the planet Venus had fallen from the sky. The Chinese name for Venus is the Great White Star, and that is why the child was called Po, meaning 'white', and has sometimes been named T'ai Po, the Great White One.⁵

By the time Li Po was received at Ming Huang's court he must have been over forty. He was a tall well-built man who was said to attack his food like a ravenous tiger and wash it down with three hundred cups of wine; yet he was a man who lived as much in fairyland as in the world of men. His songs and poems he wrote as easily as a bird sings, as effortlessly as the grass grows. It was said that before he died he wrote some twenty thousand poems; yet of this prodigal outpouring less than a tenth survived.

The poet who was introduced to Ming Huang about 742 was already well known, and had crowded many immortal moments into his four decades. Successively he had set up three wives and three different homes, and was to set up another before he died. He had begotten children; though he never seems to have stayed at home to wash the nappies. He wandered as carefree as any gay bachelor about the country,

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chumming up with hermits and wandering scholars, imbibing too freely at the wayside inns and finding great delight in drinking deep.

‘When I am drunk I lose Heaven and Earth;
Motionless I cleave to my lonely bed.
At last I forget that I exist at all,
And at *that* moment my joy is great indeed.’⁶

He was a self-confessed drunkard. He may at one time have had some money, for he claimed as a young man to have given most of it to ‘well-born young men’ worse off than himself; but until he came to court it seems likely that he lived off his relations or those of his successive wives.

There came a time when, like Confucius and other scholars before him, this strolling Idler of the Bamboo Brook, this Immortal of the Wine-cup felt the obligation to go to the capital to give the emperor an opportunity of making use of his conspicuous talents.

Wonderful Ch’angan in the days when Ming Huang, the Illustrious Sovereign, held his court there must have seemed the pivot of the universe to men of ambition. It was ‘a great cosmopolitan city where Syrians, Arabs, Persians, Tartars, Tibetans, Koreans, Japanese and Tonkinese and other peoples of widely divergent races and faiths lived side by side, presenting a remarkable contrast to the ferocious religious and racial strife then prevailing in Europe.’⁷ To this great city with its ten miles of outer walls the monk A Lo-pen had introduced Nestorian Christianity a century previously, and had won the commendation of an emperor who knew that there was more than one Sage and more than one way to Heaven. In this city could be found that tolerance which is the hallmark of true civilization. And in the first part of the eighth century it was still the Mecca of the Eastern world.

Li Po’s introduction to the court of Ming Huang may have been due—setting aside the examination story as definitely

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apocryphal—to the emperor's younger sister who had been a Taoist nun, and possibly knew of Li Po's own dabblings in that faith. Though not given an official post, the tipsy poet found an outlet for his energies in the role of court poet. As laureate he wrote of the beauty of the peonies in the imperial gardens and the loveliness of the emperor's devastating mistress Yang Kuei-fei. By his own account, his accommodation was better than what he was used to. 'I rode a colt from the emperor's stable, my stirrups were of filigree, my saddle was studded with white jade, my bed was of ivory, my mat was of fine silk. I ate out of a golden dish. Those who once turned from me with scorn, now came humbly begging for leave to pay me their respects.'⁸

His good fortune did not last long. He had to leave the gay city of Ch'angan under a cloud. One story says that he made a satirical reference to Yang Kuei-fei in a poem—a reference that was pointed out to her by a jealous eunuch; another says that he had incurred the jealousy of one of the influential literary advisers of the court. Perhaps, however, like his friend Tu Fu after him and Wang Chi⁹ before him, the quantity of wine he drank made him a little too unreliable to be given an official appointment. Tu Fu, I think, hints at this in a poem.¹⁰

'As for Li Po, give him a jugful,
He will write one hundred poems.
He drowns in a wine-shop
On a city street of Ch'angan;
And though his sovereign calls,
He will not board the imperial barge.
"Please your Majesty," says he,
"I am a god of wine.'"

Whatever the reason, Li Po left the capital; and with a crowd of his convivial friends to see him off he set out in the direction of Peking in 744—possibly to try for an official post

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of some sort under General An Lu-shan who was, eleven years later, to rebel against the throne.

Nothing came of Li Po's hopes in this direction. But in the midst of his wanderings and drinking parties he continued his Taoist studies, finally securing a diploma at a temple in Chin-an. It was about this time that he met Tu Fu, who was ten or so years his junior and also, like Li Po, very conscious of himself as a failure.

Already Tu Fu had failed his examinations once; and in his disappointment had become a wanderer and a carouser, drinking so much that he could forget his anxieties for a time, even though he paid for his excesses in ill-health. The two poets—Li Po famous already, and Tu Fu to rival that fame in later years—wrote poems to each other, drank each other's health all too frequently, and embarked on a lifelong friendship. Tu Fu wrote that he loved Li Po

‘as a younger brother loves the elder’
Drunk, we sleep under one cover at night.’¹¹

Soon after this first meeting, Tu Fu set off once more for Ch'angan to try his luck again in the examination cells. Meanwhile Li Po remained in north east Honan for the next eight or nine years, writing in this period some of his greatest poems. These vary in subject matter from the martial exploits of Chinese armies to old legends and Taoist dreams and the poet's eternal delight in drinking wine.

‘Bells and drums and fine food, what are they to me
Who only want to get drunk and never again be sober?
The Saints and Sages of old times are all stock and still,
Only the mighty drinkers of wine have left a name behind.’

Li Po's sources of income remain speculative. It seems that he was frequently entertained on the tax-payers' money, for we hear of his being welcomed by many local magistrates who competed among themselves to see who could do most to

honour the Banished Immortal. His poetry must have brought him some money, since we learn that he was commissioned to write inscriptions for Buddhist monasteries. Though he was himself a Taoist—Taoism being easily the most popular religion of this period—he appears to have been well acquainted with Buddhist thought. At this time too, Li Po showed great interest in alchemical researches as Ming Huang himself had done. For the poet was a Taoist, and Taoist minds were still haunted by the thoughts of the elixir of life.

We may wonder how much Li Po's family saw of him during all this time. Now and again he seems to be travelling in the direction of his home; but just as often he seems to be moving in the opposite direction, meeting his innumerable friends, corresponding with disillusioned intellectuals, and still apparently seeking employment on a regular basis.

Chinese artists have depicted Li Po as a cheerful pot-bellied man. The man who became the poet's literary executor commented on the huge pupils of his flashing eyes and speaks of his travelling with two singing-girls, Chao-yang and Chin-ling.

When the Abbé Sieyès was asked what he did during the terrible years of the Revolution he replied simply, 'J'ai vécu.' When An Lu-shan fomented the chaos that was to follow his victories of 755, Li Po attempted little more than the Frenchman. 'I felt,' he wrote, 'that my slight talents and shallow knowledge were not such as could save the world and that if Central China was to be overrun there was nothing I could do to save it.'¹² This was at least a realistic appraisal of the situation! The nearest equivalent to California in those days were the slopes of famous Hut Mountain near Kiukiang in Kiangsi. Hither the disgruntled intellectual retired.

It was by no means the first time Li Po had enjoyed the sloping solitudes of historic Lu Shan which overlooked the Yangtse River. He had visited them before in his travels and had probably, in his role of Taoist devotee, pondered the ancient legend of a prince of the Han dynasty who had neglected



the duties of government to seek the secret of immortality on this very mountain. This prince was supposed to have died in the hut he built on the mountain, which had given the peak its name. To this same mountain Po Chu-i was later to come to try his luck at making the pill of life in the furnace he built.

Li Po's fourth wife saw rather more of her husband than her predecessors. She seems to have been an interesting woman and well suited to be the wife of a man like Li Po, who recognized his good fortune.

'I respect you for this—that though descended from a Minister

You study *Tao* and love Spirits and Immortals,
In your white hands scooping the blue clouds,
Your gauze skirt trailing through the purple mists . . .'

She entered a nunnery on Lu Shan, some distance from Li Po's retreat.

In 757 Li Po had the chance of joining a military expedition going up the Yangtse. He went on board at Kiukiang, easily got himself accepted as a member of the prince's entourage, and thoroughly enjoyed himself—at least as far as Yangchow, where the expedition (which, perhaps unknown to Li Po, was hoping to set up a regime independent of Ming Huang's successor) broke up. This consorting with rebels and traitors earned Li Po a spell in the prison at Kiukiang before he was released by a visiting censor who took him on to his staff as an adviser.

Perhaps, now that he was in his mid-fifties, Li Po felt that a steady job was just around the corner. He got on all right with his new patron whose name was Sung Jo-ssu, and persuaded him to send a letter to the 'high ups' recommending Li Po for a position. With no false modesty and phrases about the shallowness of his abilities, the poet prepared this document himself. He embellished his past career and compared his talents with those of the sages of old. There is no hint that

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his tongue was in his cheek as he wrote of himself: 'His writings are such as to improve the manners of the people, his learning has enabled him to probe every secret of Heaven and Man. Yet he has not hitherto received a single government post, as has been noted with indignation everywhere within the Four Seas. . . . Is this man, whose name resounds throughout the Universe, to be left rotting in obscurity? . . .'¹³

It will be a long time before the 'Situations Wanted' columns of *The New Statesman and Nation* will contain a more modest announcement than that!

Li Po did not get the job; nor did he get another when he offered himself as a kind of 'boffin' to the T'ang dynasty, a master mind who would quash the rebellion. For a time he lay sick in a lonely hut in the Su-sung Hills. Then he returned to his monastic friends on Lu Shan.

But he did not stay there long. In the middle of 758 the minister who had released him from prison fell from grace. His successor banished the poet—who already believed himself to have been banished from Heaven—to Yunnan—a province of turbulent mountains, inhabited by tribal peoples, whom the Chinese looked upon as barbarians. This province on the Burma frontier seemed to the Chinese who lived in the fertile valleys of the Yangtse and Yellow Rivers to be on the very edges of the world.

Li Po never got to Yunnan. The journey took so long that he was pardoned again before he had gone up-river as far as the Yangtse Gorges. Nor had he been in any hurry to get there. He had sojourned a while in several towns along the Great River, and been entertained by so many friends and well-wishers that his inert, drunken body had frequently to be carried down to the coast for the next lap of the journey.

Li Po was growing old. He was drunk with dreams as well as with wine. He found solace more and more in remembering the life he had lived; in recapturing past memories of drinking bouts with his friends in the old capital; of visits to

the willow-slender courtesans; of his Taoist exploits in the uncharted world; of his children; of his abortive attempts to become an official. The past must have seemed doubly glorious, for around him now the magnificent world he had known as a young man was crumbling into ruins.

The main An Lu-shan rebellion had inevitably paved the way for local risings led by Notting Hill Napoleons and the familiar provincial war-lords. Almost certainly Li Po's drunken reveries were of the good old days at Ming Huang's court, when he had pulled the leg of China's most celebrated beauty and had for a little while acted the part of a great minister, riding an imperial horse. He remembered those feasts in the Pavilion of Aloes and the music in the Pear Tree Garden. What could the future hope to show to compare with the glories he had known in that City of Lasting Peace which had so betrayed its name?

With the fame his poems had given him, Li Po was not content. It was renown of a different kind he had always wanted—the recognition of his talents that an official government post would have provided. But that eluded him to the last. He was taken ill and died in 761, the drafts of his poems scattered like leaves all over China, marking his wanderings.

Around his death, as around his life, legends have grown up. There is a temple to him on the Promontory of the Rainbow-Coloured Rocks beside the Yangtse River; for it was here near Ox Ledge that the drunken poet was supposed to have fallen in love with the moon's reflection and tried to clasp its watery face within his outstretched arms. It was a favourite spot of Li Po's, and many a moonlight journey had he made by boat from here. With an official named Tsui the poet had been seen 'dressed in his embroidered court robes, laughing, chanting poems, and looking about him as though he ruled the world.'¹⁴

Another tradition says he died on Lu Shan, where once as a youth he had wandered with the white deer; and that he was

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buried by his own wish near T'aip'ing in a grave which, within half a century, was lost in a field of wild grasses.

The Taoists say he was claimed once more by the heavenly ones, and carried to Heaven on the back of a great whale escorted by dolphins. We cannot be expected to believe that.

But we may agree with them that he belongs with the immortal ones, and that in some Elysian garden the bibulous Li Po is quaffing nectar with the gods.



The Queen of Concubines

YANG KUEI-FEI

IF there is one character in the history of her country which a Chinese actress would probably wish to portray above all others, it is Yang Kuei-fei,¹ the alluring concubine of the Emperor Ming Huang, and one of the most dangerously attractive women in the long annals of the oldest of living civilizations.

She was loved by an emperor and was a favourite subject of China's greatest poets. And when she died a dynasty collapsed about her.

Mistress Yang was born in 718 in the little town of Huayin in the province of Shensi,² through which the modern Lung-hai railway runs on its way from Ch'angan to the sea. It is reported that on the night she was born her parents saw a meteor streaming through the sky. Rainbow-coloured lights lit up the bed on which she lay and thunder shook the earth. It was easy to tell that something remarkable had happened.

The frightened mother was all for getting rid of the child there and then; but the father, a petty provincial official, interpreted the omen more favourably. It meant, he said, that the child would one day reach the highest position in the land.

Unhappily, he was not to see the result of his prophecy. He died when little Yu Huan or Jade Ring—for that was the name her parents gave her—was still young; and the widow took her young family to the capital at Ch'angan, where they all became part of the household of the deceased's brother.

By the time she was sixteen Yu Huan was an accomplished

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young lady by the standards of her time. She sang and danced charmingly—later she took dancing lessons from a talented actress who was famous in the capital—and could accompany herself on the lute. Yet such talents as these were as nothing compared with her beauty.

Cosmetics could not have cost her much at this stage; for it was said that a single touch of carmine would have made her cheeks too red, while a morsel of powder would have made her face too white. Her appearance was described in the flowery phrases we have come to expect from Chinese writers. Her eyebrows curved like the branch of a willow tree; her skin was as pure as jade; her eyes and smile set men's pulses fluttering. It was not long before the beauty of Jade Ring was talked of in the markets and streets of the capital, and came at last to the ear of the emperor himself.

In 735 Ming Huang was seeking a wife for his eighteenth son, Prince Shou. Report seemed to suggest that Jade Ring would be an admirable choice, and arrangements were made to bring her to the court. The prince was captivated by the girl, and, given half a chance, would probably have been happy with her for the rest of his days.

It was, however, a short marriage. The Emperor Ming Huang's own favourite mistress died in child-birth, and the emperor was inconsolable. None of his other mistresses could make up for the one he had lost, and the court generally suffered under his grief and displeasure. In an attempt to get the Son of Heaven into a better frame of mind, a courtier suggested that Prince Shou's fascinating wife might be able to make the emperor forget the loss of his concubine.

The prince was much more upset than his lovely and ambitious wife when the command came for her to enter the imperial apartments. Mistress Yang knew her own power. She knew that when she stepped through the jewel-embroidered curtains into the presence of the great T'ang emperor she would be the power behind the throne.

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She went in cheerfully to make her obeisance to her new lord. Ming Huang watched her approach, as Li Po was to sing of her, with

‘The glory of trailing clouds in her garments,
And the radiance of a flower on her face.’³

One of the Christian Fathers tells us of a young man who suffered in one of the Diocletian persecutions. In the midst of a lovely garden he was bound with silk ribbons and tempted by a beautiful courtesan who showed him with deft movements of her body how much he had to live for. The young Christian bit out his tongue and spat it in her lovely face.

Perhaps it would have been better for this great emperor to have done the same; but Ming Huang was no Christian hero. He was utterly enraptured the moment he beheld the woman who was to ruin him. ‘If I,’ he said to her, ‘should ever be unfaithful to you, may Heaven strike me down and destroy my kingdom.’ Jade Ring had become Yang Kuei-fei—Yang the Imperial Concubine.

‘Henceforth the king never summoned his morning *levees*. She shared his pleasures and feasts, was never at leisure, Accomplice of his journeys in spring, companion of his nights.

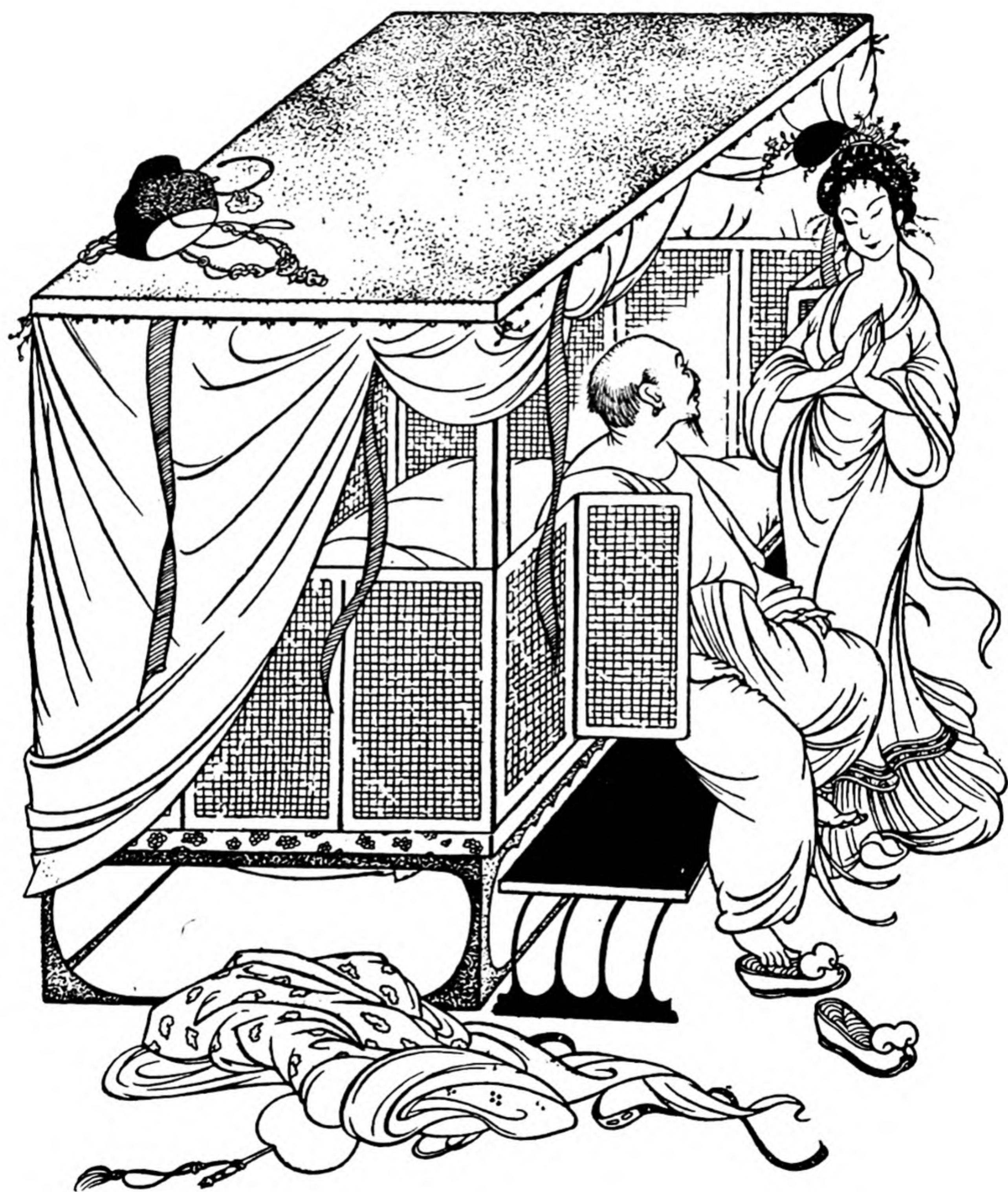
There were three thousand beauties in the inner apartments,

But of all these three thousand he loved only one.

In a gold house she prepared herself for the night,

In jade towers after feasting they surrendered to drunkenness.’⁴

Yang Kuei-fei's rise to power in accordance with Chinese practice benefited her family. Her three sisters (two of whom were older than herself), her uncle, brother and two cousins were installed in palaces on the Black Horse Hills near Ch'an-gan. The sisters were given titles and handsome gifts by the



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emperor, and each of them received large monthly sums from the exchequer to defray the expenses they incurred in keeping their lovely complexions intact. Even obscure branches of the Yang clan enjoyed the imperial favour, and when they came to the court in new, brightly coloured robes, they were likened to hundreds of moving flowers.⁵ The people of Ch'angan soon had cause to fear the arrogant Yang family. As for Yang Kuei-fei herself, when she gave an order, the provincial governors observed it as if it were an imperial decree.

We are told that at this time parents prayed for daughters rather than sons—an unheard of state of affairs in China, where the desire to 'continue the incense smoke' by propagating a family line of male descendants is so intense. But now parents hoped their daughters might become imperial concubines and so lift their parents and cousins and obscure ancestors into the radiance of the imperial glory.

It was a costly business to satisfy the whims of Yang Kuei-fei; and when she was not satisfied she revealed an ugly temper, whose edge was frequently felt by the other neglected women in the palace. As for the common people, they suffered from higher taxes and arbitrary laws.

Mistress Yang was deluged with presents, and the imperial envoys were kept busy scouring the provinces to find gifts and novelties. There was, for instance, Yang Kuei-fei's passion for juicy *lichis*—a sweet fruit about the size of a cherry which flourishes abundantly in Kwangtung. She liked to have these brought freshly from Canton, over 800 miles away; and relays of swift horses were established across the country so that the fruit could be carried to the breakfast table of the imperial concubine. The carriers were punished if the fruit failed to arrive on time.

Yang Kuei-fei's temper was liable to give her toothache, and on one occasion she became so unbearable that even the infatuated Ming Huang came to the end of his tether. He sent her away from the court back to her old home at Huayin.

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She did not stay there long. In her absence the emperor himself raged like a bear about the court, the terror of eunuchs, women and servants alike. To restore tranquillity to the Dragon Throne, the chief eunuch persuaded the emperor to ask Yang Kuei-fei to return.

When the imperial request reached her, the artful minx said she had deserved death for what she had done, and sent word that she proposed to kill herself. But she was so long doing it that the remorseful emperor had time to send a sweet-smelling chariot of sandalwood to bring her back to his arms.

He never sent her away again, though unbeknown to him the plump beauty sometimes escaped to other arms than the emperor's own—to those of the handsome⁶ flattering Tartar, An Lu-shan. An Lu-shan, who seems to have had both Iranian and Turkish blood in his veins, had been born in what is now southern Manchuria and had joined the Chinese army as a youth. In his chosen career he had done well. According to one version, he had wormed himself into the good books of the emperor, who had adopted the crafty youth as a son. Even Yang Kuei-fei jocularly referred to him as her son when she was merry with wine; but it was common gossip in the palace that it was not as a son that the bright-eyed An Lu-shan entered the pavilions of his foster mother.

One day, indeed, it seemed that even the doting eyes of Ming Huang would notice that something was going on. The Son of Heaven was commenting on a favourite theme of his: the unsurpassed beauty of Kuei-fei's breasts. And An Lu-shan, who had no business to be anything more than a distant admirer of these twin glories, put in: 'Yes, and they're as smooth as satin to the touch.' While the courtiers held their breath, Ming Huang prattled on unaware that his adopted child had betrayed himself.

As the weeks passed, An Lu-shan became so arrogant in his pride at possessing the most beautiful woman of the age that he, in his turn, set the courtiers scheming to get rid of his

overpowering presence. They eventually secured his promotion to a command on the northern frontiers of the empire.⁷ They little realized, as they chuckled over the success of their plan, that they were igniting the fuse which would shatter an empire!

But it was a long fuse; and though Yang Kuei-fei yearned a little for her Tartar lover, she was kept well enough amused in the imperial pavilions where she dangled, like a puppet from a string, the ever bewitched occupant of the throne of China. And when she felt the need of still more discriminating praise, there was the banished immortal, Li Po, who had been brought to the palace after being discovered, dead drunk, in one of the Ch'angan wine-shops, where he had been maintaining his reputation as one of the Eight Immortals of the Wine-cup. Possibly the descriptive phrase Lamb applied to Coleridge would have suited the Chinese poet even better—'an archangel a little damaged'.

The banished immortal wrote many beautiful poems in praise of Yang Kuei-fei. One of them goes:

'The glory of trailing clouds is in her garments,
And the radiance of a flower on her face.
O heavenly apparition, found only far above
On the top of the mountains of Many Jewels,
Or in the fairy Palace of Crystal when the moon is up! . . .'⁸

When the poet was stupefied with wine, the court attendants would dip his head in cold water; and when he came up gasping he would seize a brush and write one of those songs that have ever since been the delight of the Chinese people. In the grounds of the Palace was the Pear Tree Garden which had been established by the art-loving Ming Huang as a school of drama and music. It is to this Pear Tree Garden that the origins of the Chinese theatre have been traced. To this day the actors of China call themselves 'Pupils of the Pear Garden'. During the reign of this emperor, the new songs of Li Po were

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sung here to the assembled court by the famous Li Kuei-nien. Sometimes the musical Ming Huang accompanied the singer on a flute of jade. Sometimes Yang Kuei-fei herself played on a sandalwood mandolin which a eunuch had brought back with him from Szechwan. It had a high polish, and while she played she used it as a mirror.

Caught up in the life of this brilliant court, Yang Kuei-fei soon forgot An Lu-shan, hatching his plots in far away Fan-yang.

Then too there was the new Huach'ing Palace, built as a summer resort a few miles outside the capital. Here there were no fewer than sixteen marble pools for the ladies of the court to bathe in—there is nothing new about the culture of Beverly Hills! But finer than any of these pools was the emperor's own. It was surrounded by carvings of birds promising longevity; and here, on moonlit nights, the emperor and his concubine bathed together, as the wicked Emperor Tiberias is rumoured to have bathed with the Sirens themselves in the famous Blue Grotto of Capri.

Yet perhaps there were moments when Ming Huang contemplated sadly the change that had come over him. He had not always been like this—self-indulgent, extravagant, and given over to his passion for a woman. His reign had begun with great promise. He had been frugal in personal habits and energetic in the checking of administrative abuses. He had endowed a library and founded schools throughout the empire. He had widened the range of the classical examinations. Now all desire to exert himself in these directions had left him. His energy had gone. Soft, pampered, spoilt with luxury, Ming Huang wanted only to enjoy the wine and the poetry, the music and the charms of his women. To all requests from his ministers to turn his mind to the problems of state he turned a deaf ear.

They badly needed his attention. Since the year 745 the hated Li Lin-fu had exercised almost tyrannical power as chief

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minister according to his very inadequate lights. During his regime political opponents were not simply banished as they had been from time immemorial: 'they were condemned to death on trumped-up charges of one sort or another and assassinated on the spot by special envoys.'⁹ When this hated gentleman died in 752, one of Yang Kuei-fei's cousins, Yang Kuo-chung, succeeded him and did his best to emulate the deceased's methods of government. It was little wonder that to many—though these do not include representatives of the Chinese orthodox school of historians¹⁰—An Lu-shan was to appear as a champion rather than as a rebel.

This was no time for Ming Huang to be spending his days fondling Yang Kuei-fei; no time to be telling her that, though Heaven and earth should pass away, their love would last for ever. This was fiddling while Rome burned with a vengeance.

For already the writing was on the wall. The man who had been Yang Kuei-fei's lover was nearly ready. He made an alliance with the Tartars. Then began the rebellion which was to cost China thirty million lives and be immortalised by Po Chu-i as 'The Long Woe'.

In his march southwards to Ch'angan, An Lu-shan carried all before him. The imperial army which should have snuffed out the insurrection overnight had become soft and corrupt like the court it was supposed to serve. It offered little resistance. Ming Huang, we are told, contemplated leading it himself, but was easily persuaded to leave the mock heroics to others. He made ready to leave Ch'angan—at that time the finest, most wonderful capital city in the world.

With a small retinue, which included Yang Kuei-fei and some of her relatives, and an escort of soldiers, Ming Huang, occupier for so long of the Dragon Throne, fled through the Gate of Prolonged Autumn towards the mountains on the western borders of the empire.

But it was not long before the escorting soldiers grew homesick in the wild inhospitable country and mutinied, killing

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Kuei-fei's two sisters and her intriguing cousin Yang Kuo-chung. Just as the body of Li Lin-fu was disinterred after death and slung into a pauper's grave, so now the miserable corpse of his successor suffered a like dishonour. The foolish head of Yang Kuo-chung was hacked off and given to the birds.

The blood the soldiers had shed was not enough. They told the emperor that the imperial concubine must also die; for it was she who had encouraged the imperial folly and made them fugitives. In vain the emperor pleaded for the life of Yang Kuei-fei.

The soldiers took the woman who had helped to fritter away the fortunes of an empire over to an old pear tree whose branches overhung the route. They handed her a silk cord, and watched her until the most beautiful face in all China ceased to be beautiful any more.

‘Knitting her moth eye-brows, death caught her among the
horses,

Her hair-pins scattered over the earth, no one picking
them up—

Kingfisher feathers, gold birds, combs of jade.

The emperor hid his face, unable to save her. . . .’¹¹

The glory of T'ang was over. The golden reign of Ming Huang, the Illustrious Sovereign, belonged to history.

It is said that the exiled Ming Huang was haunted by the memory of the woman he had loved, and paid a Taoist magician to discover her whereabouts in the Spirit World. Yet in telling her that their love would last for ever, the emperor had spoken truer than he knew. In the great narrative poem of Po Chu-i, in the songs of Li Po, and in the hearts of the people who inhabit the Flowery Middle Kingdom, the love of Ming Huang for Yang Kuei-fei is enshrined for ever.



The Prince of Painters

WU TAO-TZU

SOME years ago when I was sitting in the Sistine Chapel in Rome looking up at the great frescoes of Michelangelo, I could not help wondering how long it would be before the last glimmerings of colour vanished from the walls to leave this Vatican chapel as bare as it had been before the great Italian painter had carried his paints and brushes through the door. For how many more centuries could the cleaners and restorers preserve the splendours within this room? In Milan, Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, cracking and peeling on a damp monastery wall, was already a shadow of what it must have been. It had survived wars and revolutions. But how long would this and other works of genius survive time itself?

A sixteenth century Chinese writer once said that 'a picture will last five hundred years; after eight hundred years, its spirit has fled; after a thousand, there is nothing left'.¹

Fortunately, sculptured marble is more durable than paint, and barring the ravages of war, the Pietà, the Moses, the David, and the wonderful figures on the tomb of Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence will tell of the genius of Michelangelo even when none of his original oils remains. Nor must we forget the reproductions, the copies, the disciples who painted after the fashion of their master.

But if, for a moment, we can imagine a time in the future when every certain trace of the artist's own work has vanished, and only faded copies or imitations remain, together with the accounts of contemporaries who had watched marble and

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canvas come to life under the touch of the master's fingers, then there would survive legends of a painter who had toiled for seven years on a fresco of the Last Judgment which had once covered an altar wall in the papal palace, and who had designed a ceiling that was the wonder of the Renaissance. For legend hangs like an aroma about the lives of great men; and sometimes we make a kind of history out of it when we cannot lay our hands on what William James called 'the stubborn, irreducible facts', and yet have to try to account for something or someone too considerable to be ignored.

What do we really know, for instance, of this man Wu Tao-tzu—the man who under the name of Godoshi is revered virtually as the father of Japanese painting? Almost nothing. The experts argue among themselves how many of the surviving scrolls attributed to him are his own work; while of the great wall paintings which made him renowned in the eighth century no trace at all survives.

A critical work on Chinese art written by a Chinese author about the beginning of the twelfth century tells of the remote masters whose works were known only by repute. The author writes of Wu Tao-tzu as a 'modern', and yet bemoans the fact that it was impossible to get hold of a single example of his work. In the catalogue of the imperial collections of the twelfth century, ninety-three of Wu's paintings are referred to by name; and according to Petrucci it is from copies and wood engravings made at this time that our knowledge of this T'ang dynasty Michelangelo derives.

Yet, even if every scrap of pictorial evidence had to be rejected, the stories related of him are not merely evidence that he lived, but make us aware of the impact of his genius on Chinese and Japanese culture.

It may not be true that he could paint waves in such a way that all night long you could hear them breaking on the shore. It may not be true that he could paint the wind itself. But one of the greatest authorities on Oriental art, Ernest Fenollosa,

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had no doubt of Wu Tao-tzu's place in the painters' paradise. 'Altogether we must regard Godoshi, whether as compared with architects, sculptors, or painters, as one of the very greatest of the line masters of the world.'²

The Prince of Painters of All Generations, as Wu Tao-tzu has been called, appears to have been born in Loyang in Honan Province around the beginning of the eighth century A.D. He was an orphan who showed a remarkable talent for painting while still a lad, and whose works were soon to be found all over the city. The reputation he so rapidly acquired brought him to the notice of Emperor Hsuan Tsung, or—to give him the reign title by which we have referred to him elsewhere—Ming Huang. The great T'ang emperor, in the early days when he found more in life to interest him than the breasts of Yang Kuei-fei, gathered to his court at Ch'angan the most talented persons in the empire. And Wu Tao-tzu was far from being the least of these. The emperor appointed him a 'Doctor of the Inner Teaching', and ordered him to paint no more save with the imperial decree.³

On the vast walls of Ming Huang's vanished palaces, the great ink landscapes of Wu Tao-tzu began to take shape. Those who watched him at work were spellbound. It seemed to them as if a god held that magic brush which, in a single stroke, could taper from a solid mass of ink to a line no thicker than a hair.

In style Wu followed Chang Seng-yu the great painter who had lived two centuries before him. Indeed, Wu Tao-tzu claimed to be a reincarnation of Chang. In this rich age of Taoist myth many a man was able to identify himself as having lived before under another name; and it is not surprising that Wu Tao-tzu and Chang Seng-yu should have been identified in this way. Of both fantastic stories are told.

When Chang Seng-yu painted dragons he dared not finish them. He always left out the eyes, claiming that the dragons would fly away if he inserted them. Once he was challenged

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to prove so rash a claim. Chang painted in the eyes and—so the story goes—there was a great burst of thunder and a lightning flash, and the great wings of the dragon carried it skywards.

Like Wu, Chang Seng-yu painted murals for many Buddhist temples. Once, in a temple in Nanking, he painted Confucius and ten great Confucian scholars in the company of the Buddha. The emperor was astonished at this, and asked why he had painted Confucianists in a Buddhist temple. Chang answered: 'They will have their use later!' And so it proved. Four centuries after, in the later Chou dynasty, when a persecution of Buddhists led to the destruction of their temples and sacred pagodas, the temple at Nanking was spared because of the Confucianists Chang Seng-yu had painted therein.

After Wu Tao-tzu had been famous long enough to make enemies, the latter, jealous of his skill, circulated the following couplet in the streets of Ch'angan:

'Tao-tzu's skill and Hui-chih's⁴ too,
Both are stolen from Chang Seng-yu.'

To which, I expect, Wu Tao-tzu replied that, since he and Chang Seng-yu were, to discerning eyes, one and the same person, the jibe was irrelevant so far as he was concerned!

Contemporary records all emphasize the speed at which Wu Tao-tzu worked; the way his brush vibrated to express movement, as in his famous portrait of General P'ei Mu done about the year 720. He made the general perform a sword dance, and painted him with lightning strokes of the brush while he leaped and twirled in the air.

He did not make rough sketches of what were to be his great masterpieces. He saw them as life-size wholes, and with great rapidity of execution brought his vision to life.

On one of his palace walls Ming Huang wanted a scenic representation of the Kialing River which flows into the

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Yangtse at Chungking in Szechwan. He commissioned both Wu Tao-tzu and another artist named Li Ssu-hsun to make paintings of a stretch of the Kialing. They made the journey to Szechwan, studied the wild and beautiful landscape, and returned to the Tatong Palace. Li Ssu-hsun worked for months on his painting; but in one day Wu Tao-tzu finished a wonderful panorama showing a hundred miles of scenery along the river.

This sketch of the Wu Tao-tzu legend makes no pretence at dealing with the techniques of painting which Wu either inherited, modified or invented. Those qualified to comment on such matters suggest that Wu's flexible brush-strokes and thick line were after the manner of the painter Ku K'ai-chih. Compared with other great painters Wu appears sparing with the ink, but the scratchiness was all part of the effect.

A landscape painter, Ching Hao by name, once commented on this in a striking phrase. Wu Tao-tzu, he said, 'in painting landscape had the brush, but not the paint.' But this was not meant as a criticism. Chan-kou said of a cluster of bamboos which Wu painted without the aid of colour that even in monochrome they resembled their counterparts in the fields. With the black soot compound the Chinese use for ink, Wu Tao-tzu was able to get a remarkable range of tones; and with his brush, as we have seen, he could draw lines of any desired degree of thickness. In later life he is said to have used a brush the size of a cabbage. 'There has never been another painter's tool in the world,' says Fenollosa, 'brush, charcoal, or burin, which compares in force, ease and gradation with the great Chinese brush.'⁵

The same critic contrasts the tranquil landscapes of that other great T'ang painter, Wang Wei—of whom it was said that his poems were pictures, his pictures poems—with the surging power of those by Wu Tao-tzu. He describes one of Wu's silk scrolls in these words: 'Mountains rise like a great screen over the whole tall picture, so that almost no sky

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appears in the grouping. It is all mountain gorge filled with plunging streams and cold mists. But the utmost splendour of drawing has been thrown into the trees; the tall pines with angles and twists of mighty character, as strongly worked out as a portrait.'⁶

Dragons, those wonderful creatures who could bring the rain and the mist with a twitch of their wings were a favourite subject for Wu Tao-tzu, as for all the classical Chinese painters. He painted five on Ming Huang's palace walls; and these were so real that when it rained the dragons almost disappeared in the mists that exuded from them.

Even humbler creatures than dragons were given life by his brush. When he found himself treated rudely in one of the monasteries he visited, Tao-tzu painted a donkey on the refectory wall. During the night the furniture of the room was kicked to pieces, and the donkey looked healthy enough to repeat the process *ad infinitum*. When they saw the damage, the shocked monks mended their manners. Humbly apologising for their rudeness, they asked the painter to erase his work. After he had done so, the new furniture was left in peace.

But Wu Tao-tzu was a Buddhist as well as a great painter. This Indian-born faith, whose overland journey to China is one of the most exciting events in the religious history of man, had long since passed beyond the dream of a frightened emperor⁷ to become established as one of the 'three religions' of China. In the tolerant intellectually-stimulating T'ang dynasty it gathered a new impetus; and though Wu Tao-tzu was only a layman—and perhaps a not very devout one at that—his religious paintings seem to have had an effect which the orthodox missionaries might well have envied.

'Chinese painting,' writes Petrucci, 'had already known the genii and fairies of Taoism, the Rishi or wizards living in mountain solitudes, the Immortals dwelling in distant isles beyond the sea. It now knew gods wrapped in the ecstatic

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contemplation of Nirvana, with smiling mouth and half-closed eyes, revealing mystic symbols in a broad and apostolic gesture.'⁸ These gods and goddesses Wu painted supremely. There was his famous Sakyamuni Buddha sitting cross-legged; there was the standing Kuanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, with the green dragon-shaped cloud of evil about to pass over the heads of two boys playing. In another painting the robes of the angels were said to move in the wind. He must have painted hundreds of Buddhas, showing the saint lying sick or waging triumphant war on the forces of evil.

Even if these pictures of his had survived An Lu-shan's rebellion, it is unlikely that they would have survived the innumerable other wars and persecutions from that day to this. But we are told of at least one great masterpiece describing the life of the Buddha from beginning to end. It adorned the wall of a temple in Fenghsiang which perished in the chaos of this bloody epoch. It is described by a Chinese writer who most probably saw it with his own eyes. 'The picture includes scenery, buildings, human figures, birds and beasts, to the number of several thousands. It is the most beautiful and perfect work of all ages. While Buddha is passing into Nirvana, the bhikshus are beating their breasts and stamping in lamentation, as though utterly beyond self-control. Even the birds of the air and the beasts of the field are wailing and knocking their heads on the ground. Only the Buddha himself is placid . . . with no trace of anguish on his face.'⁹

Another painting of Wu Tao-tzu's frequently referred to by later artists was one of Chung K'uei the celebrated exorcist of devils, whose name is, to this day, frequently painted on the doors of houses to keep the demons at bay. This showed the one-eyed magician holding a demon in his left hand and gouging out one of its eyes with the forefinger of the right. So realistic was the expression on Chung K'uei's face reputed to be that, when some centuries later, a ruler commissioned a similar painting from one of his artists, ordering him to make

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the exorcist do the eye-gouging with the more powerful thumb-nail, the artist replied that a quite different picture would be required. In Wu Tao-tzu's it was possible to see the link between the facial expression and the crooked forefinger!

This remarkable painting of Chung K'uei is supposed to have been done, like so many others, at the command of the Emperor Ming Huang. There is a story¹⁰ that the emperor had fallen sick of a fever after a trip to Mount Li in Shensi. His illness brought on nightmares; and in one of these the emperor found himself plagued by a small demon 'fantastically dressed in red trousers, with a shoe on one foot, but none on the other, and a shoe hanging from his girdle'. This mischievous sprite gambolled through the emperor's dream, in and out of the palace rooms, annoying the royal dreamer intensely.

Just as Ming Huang was about to call for his guards, another figure entered his dream. This was a huge man 'wearing a tattered head-covering and a blue robe, a horn clasp on his belt, and official boots on his feet'. It was Chung K'uei. Quickly he seized the demon—whose name Hsu Hao signified emptiness and devastation—gouged out one of its eyes and swallowed it. He then introduced himself to the Emperor Ming Huang.

He was, he said, in the reign of Kao Tsu a student who had failed to gain a first class degree in the imperial examinations. Unable to endure the shame of his failure, he had committed suicide on the steps of the royal palace. But the emperor, hearing too late of his merit, ordered him to be buried in a green robe as if he had been a member of the imperial family. This so impressed the spirit of the deceased Chung K'uei that in gratitude he vowed to protect Kao Tsu and his successors against the wiles of the demon Hsu Hao. That was why he had appeared in Ming Huang's dream.

Awaking, Ming Huang found his fever gone. Only the vivid dream remained. He called Wu Tao-tzu to him and ordered him to preserve the dream with his paints and brushes.

Wu Tao-tzu set to work. When he had finished he had

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created the very likeness of Chung K'uei, and Ming Huang could only wonder again at the magic of his art.

We are told that when the eighteenth century evangelist, George Whitefield, preached one of his early sermons in Gloucester 'at least fifteen people were "driven mad"'.¹¹ When John Wesley preached in the open-air in Bristol 'people dropped to the ground as though felled by a sudden blow, they roared aloud, and were agitated by cruel, unsightly convulsions'¹² before these gave way to a deep peace of mind.

Wu Tao-tzu's pictures of the torments of hell had similar effects on people who found themselves convicted of their sins.

There had been pictures of hell before Wu Tao-tzu's. It was a favourite theme of Buddhist artists—perhaps because their imaginations could range over so wide a territory. For the Buddhists taught that there were eight hot hells and eight ice-cold hells, though sometimes this number is whittled down to ten. They were situated beneath Mount Sumeru, that great mountain of Hindu mythology where the Four Kings of Heaven live, and which towers up from the centre of the world. In these abodes the sufferings of the damned were, as in early Christian theology, interminable and infinitely varied. Artists depicted in great detail 'men and women flayed by demons, roasting on red-hot cylinders, pounded in mortars, sawn asunder, being transformed into beasts, and undergoing other indescribable sufferings'.¹³

But Wu Tao-tzu's paintings were different. Only the hells he painted succeeded in making the butchers and fishmongers of Ch'angan abandon their trades, though these had long lain under the anathema of Buddhist priests. Temporarily, at least, he seems to have frightened the people of the capital into vegetarianism!

Huang Po-ssu, a twelfth century art critic, contrasted Wu's hell with others 'now to be seen in temples and pagodas. It has no "Knife Forest" (where the wicked are impaled on



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swords), no cauldron of boiling water, no ox-headed or green-faced lictors; and yet its gloomy horrors are such as to make beholders sweat and their hair stand on end, themselves shivering all the time, though it may not be cold. It has caused men to seek after virtue and give up evil practices.'¹⁴

Those at all familiar with Chinese history and legend will not need telling that stories such as these I have retold here exist about the work of many other artists besides Wu Tao-tzu. They are exaggerated accounts of the way the minds of Chinese men and women responded to the ethereal beauties they saw around them in temples and palaces and on scrolls hanging in their own homes. There were many superb landscape and portrait painters. By all accounts there was only one Wu Tao-tzu.

In a T'ang work on painting, the *Ming Hu Lu*, Wu Tao-tzu is the sole artist to be placed in the 'Upper-inspired' class. 'His art establishes itself side by side with Phidias and Michelangelo' says Fenollosa; and he goes on to suggest that perhaps the genius of this man alone is enough to rank T'ang painting as equal with the splendours of Sung. For did not Li Lung-mien, Li the Dragon-faced,¹⁵ the greatest of Sung dynasty painters, play the sedulous ape to the great T'ang master?

The mystery surrounding Wu Tao-tzu's birth and early years is nothing compared with the mystery of his end. I would give a lot to believe the wonderful legend that tells of his departure from the world. As Laurence Binyon says, 'it is symbolical of the way in which a painting was regarded'—as 'the home of the painter's soul'.¹⁶

The legend, which appears to derive from a Japanese source, tells how Wu Tao-tzu set to work one day on a tremendous landscape painting which was to cover a whole wall in Ming Huang's palace. He worked behind drawn curtains, and when he had finished, these were pulled aside to reveal a scene that filled the artistic emperor with delight.

Tao-tzu pointed to a corner of the picture where a cave

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could be seen beside a temple. 'Inside that temple grotto there is a spirit, your Majesty.' He clapped his hands and the cave opened. 'The interior,' said the painter to the astounded emperor, 'is lovely beyond conception. May I show you the way?'

With these words he passed into the cave, beckoning Ming Huang to follow. But before the emperor could do so the cave shut, and the whole painting began to fade. In a few moments the wall was as white as it was before Wu had begun to paint.

Wu Tao-tzu was never seen again.

9



The Unholy Nun

YU HSUAN-CHI

ON an autumn day somewhere about the year 870—the time when the Danes were plundering the England of King Alfred—a young Chinese woman, not yet thirty years of age, was led to the execution ground of the City of Lasting Peace and there decapitated. With the flash of that merciless sword there ended a life which, for variety and virtuosity, was perhaps without equal among the women of the T'ang dynasty.

For Yu Hsuan-chi was a woman of many talents. She was of repute as a scholar, poet, beauty, traveller, courtesan, nun. And when the world looked upon her with favour no longer, she was executed as a criminal on a trumped-up charge of murder.

In a time when respectable women tucked themselves away in secluded courtyards, and when not so respectable women found themselves treated like chattels, she did her best to live like a free human being. The fact that the *Zeitgeist* was against her was her misfortune.

Among the talented and beautiful women of that glorious T'ang dynasty, the compiler of a contemporary *Who's Who?* put Yu Hsuan-chi first. Before she was sixteen her 'apricot cheeks and almond eyes' had made the girl they called Sweet Orchid known to a good many boys in the city of Ch'angan. The people of her neighbourhood were proud of her, little knowing that a decade or so later they might be watching her die.

She was born in 842,¹ and it is thought that her father was an impoverished schoolmaster. Certainly her achievements make this likely; for while still a girl she was famed for her

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knowledge of the classical books and wrote with the most exquisite brush strokes. Had she been a man, she must surely have entered for the examinations which would have taken her to an official post. As it was, she could only make eyes at the young graduates who, having made their mark in the provinces, had come to the capital to assault the higher rungs of the Chinese examination ladder.

Indeed, one of her earliest poems was entitled 'Scholar Li's gift of a Mat'. The young man in question was a handsome fellow who had come to Ch'angan from his Shensi village home to sit for the Triennial Examinations. Li Tzu-an was already married. In accordance with custom, his wife had been chosen for him while he was still a child; and from what we know of her it seems likely that Li was glad to have left her at home; though this, in any case, was the proper and natural thing to have done. Never was it truer than it was in ancient China that the wife's place was in the home.

In neither beauty nor attractiveness did Mrs Li compare with the 'mist and flower' maidens who made eyes at him from the brothel area of Ch'angan. One's fellow students, the free and easy ladies, and the ubiquitous 'night-clubs' and wine-shops all combined to make the capital an excellent place for sowing wild oats; and it was not surprising that many saddened young debauchees returned home minus the tassel and hatpin which would have denoted the award of official rank following on the successful passing of the examinations.

But Li Tzu-an was not one of these unfortunates. Perhaps that was because he had fallen in love with Sweet Orchid, whose beauty and talent with the *p'i pa* exceeded that commonly found in the red-light quarter, and whose knowledge of the set examination books was probably greater than his own. This seventeen year old girl not merely satisfied his amorous desires, but encouraged his studies too, reading his practice essays and probably enhancing them with her own marginal comments.

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Yu Hsuan-chi was deeply in love with her young graduate lover. It was useless for her to have scholarly ambitions: she could at least encourage his. Possibly they used to sit together watching the great and wealthy men of the T'ang empire strutting along the broad Street of Heaven as Po Chu-i the poet had watched them not so long ago.

‘With haughty mien they fill the ways,
And gorgeous gleam their saddletrees;
I ask, who are they? Someone says,
The Court officials these.

Scarlet-sashed ministers are there,
Red-tasselled generals in crowds;
Their minds are bent on sumptuous fare;
Their steeds pass by like clouds.’²

One day, Yu Hsuan-chi may well have told herself, my Li will be famous like those mandarins in the carts the black oxen are pulling. When that day comes, I shall catch the reflection of his glory and be a great lady. But even if he did not, he was a fascinating man and she loved him dearly.

Li felt much the same way about Yu Hsuan-chi; and after he had passed his examinations, he took her as his concubine. Together they set off out to his village home where the faithful but unattractive Penelope was awaiting the return of her Odysseus, and probably wondering if he had managed to get along all right without her.

To our western minds it may seem perfectly obvious that nothing but trouble could result from this all too familiar triangle; and because trouble did in fact result we may tend to take too much credit for our foresightedness. Yet there was nothing inevitable about what happened. Perhaps, however, we may admit that Li was optimistic and had forgotten the shrewish qualities of the woman he had been obliged to marry. Perhaps the knowledge (fresh in his mind) which he had of

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the Confucian classics led him to suppose that the attitude of his peasant wife would be inspired by the same high-minded teaching. Certainly he had done nothing unusual, and never imagined that this action was starting his youthful mistress on a path that would end at the block.

A wife was supposed to put her husband's happiness first, encourage him to take concubines to look after him when on his official journeys from home, and make these ladies welcome in the courtyard and apartments that fell to her management. Dr Legge, the great sinologue, in his comments on the *She-King* writes: 'The institution of the harem is very prominent, and there the wife appears lovely on her entering into it with entire devotion to her husband's happiness, free from all jealousy of the inferior inmates, in the most friendly spirit promoting their comfort and setting them an example of frugality and industry.'³

'In old Chinese fiction,' writes Olga Lang, 'a great number of women take their husband's concubines for granted.'⁴ She goes on to cite examples of friendly wives from novels like the *Hung Lou Meng* and equally celebrated *Chin Ping Mei*. There is little doubt that this friendliness between wife and concubines was encouraged by the more philosophically-minded Chinese. But there is equally little doubt that a good deal of behaviour fell far short of the ideal.

Olga Lang cites something worse than an example of bad manners in one of the imperial harems, when a princess 'cut off the nose, ears and genitalia of her rival and threw them into her unfaithful husband's face in the presence of the assembled courtiers'.⁵ Though she did not go to such extreme lengths as this enraged princess, another wife in the T'ang dynasty shaved the heads of two concubines presented to her husband by the emperor. I expect this less drastic operation effectively cured the husband of his infatuation; for I seem to recall that the learned Rev. Dr Opimian, in T. L. Peacock's novel *Gryll Grange*, once argued at considerable length that

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even the lovely Venus herself would have left Apuleius unmoved if she had appeared before him hairless!

Yu Hsuan-chi was far from being hairless, and Mrs Li had not the character to be anything more than a scold. We can picture their first meeting. On the one hand, the prejudiced peasant Penelope; on the other, the alluring, chic concubine, used to the ways of the big city, and likely to be unimpressed by anything she would see in this Shensi village. From the first the wife hated Hsuan-chi, and never let her forget her inferior position in the household.

The girl whose fingers were so nimble with the writing brush found that she was expected to spend most of her time with the household brushes. She sweated at the chores and endured the enmity of Mrs Li as best she could. Her love for Li Tzu-an kept her going.

Yet he too was not the man he had been. In the city he had been swaggering, loving and carefree; here at home he was conventional and respectable, much like everyone else, apparently content to settle down in a village rut with this tartar of a wife to nag him. What is more, his attitude to his city mistress had changed too. He seldom interfered when Hsuan-chi was being tormented by his wife and—what to her was far worse—seemed far less attracted by her than he had been in Ch'angan. The dreams they had dreamed together rapidly dissolved as his infatuation waned.

When life at the Li home became utterly unbearable for Yu Hsuan-chi, she went to a cottage on a nearby mountain where she wrote sad poetry and waited for her lover to visit her. Here she remained for about a year; while the intervals between Li Tzu-an's visits became increasingly longer, and her poems ever more melancholy.

'South of the River, north of the River, wandering comfortless,

Remembering you, longing for you, sighing in loneliness.'⁶



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However tired of her Li had become, she idealized the image of him which she had first seen in those Ch'angan streets.

‘Not of steep mountain trails or perilous ascents
Will I complain, but of the hard, hard ways of love!’

Her poetry and her fishing did not fill up her time—

‘Idle . . . nothing to do . . .
Abandoned in the wilds, with time to spare . . .’

At the end of a year in this lonely retreat, Yu Hsuan-chi forced herself to realize that the Li Tzu-an she had loved had gone for ever. Alone, unable to get a divorce on the grounds of abandonment, and therefore unable either to marry or become once more an eligible maiden, Hsuan-chi set off for Ch'angan and the Taoist nunnery whose walls adjoined the Monastery of Boundless Contentment on the hills above the city of her birth.

Her reputation as a poet and scholar had preceded her. The elder monks and nuns welcomed this calligrapher and poet whose presence would increase the renown of their retreat. Dressed in her white gown and Taoist cap of feathers, the sad and beautiful novice was left to write her poetry and meditate on the Taoist classics and her own misfortunes.

For this was not a strict order. There were no solemn vows and no rigid barriers between those within the cloister and those without. The nuns were free to visit friends in the city and to receive callers at the nunnery. ‘Chastity, temperance, and obedience were virtues commended, but not exacted, under the Taoist rule. A vague mysticism, a penchant for necromancy, and a bent toward spiritism were the qualities most desirable in a novice.’⁷ Even the immortal Yang Kuei-fei, it was said, had for a short while been a Taoist nun.

What did it matter if the Monastery and Nunnery of Boundless Contentment had a reputation for ‘goings-on’? Taoism

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put far fewer checks on the natural instincts and impulses of men and women than early Christianity; yet 'the writers of the middle ages are full of accounts of nunneries that were like brothels,⁸ of the vast multitude of infanticides within their walls, and of that inveterate prevalence of incest among the clergy'.⁹ It was best to be a moderate even in pursuit of the virtues. The *Tao* did not call for effort; striving but set one more obstacle in the path to enlightenment: to struggle against the impulses of one's nature was purposeless. There were more ways than one of expressing the *Tao*, and if there had not been it is certain that the nunneries would have been rapidly depopulated. They were less the retreats of women with a sense of vocation than the only places open to discarded wives and other superfluous women—as, indeed, were the nunneries of Medieval England.¹⁰ What was more natural than that such ladies should take a nunnery as they found it, and seek such substitutes for happiness as were followed by the other nuns?

In a popular Chinese play *The White Fur-coat*, there is a long soliloquy entitled 'A Young Nun's Worldly Desires' in which she imagines that all the images in the Hall of the Five Hundred Disciples are making eyes at her.¹¹ It is too long to quote here; but it illustrates the fact that the Chinese were every bit as aware of the inhibitions of monks and nuns as Boccaccio himself.

'Security, freedom and appreciation were genial elements of Yu Hsuan-chi's cloistered life, and stimulating social contacts, cultural pursuits, and religious studies filled her days.'¹² But there were other genial elements of a gayer and dissolute kind.

Since the time of her neglect by Li Tzu-an, Hsuan-chi had been doing some steady drinking. Nor was there anything particularly unusual about this, even though Yu Hsuan-chi carried it a bit further than most women. Poets were expected to drink.

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Did not Po Chu-i have two jars of wine suspended from the carrying poles of his chair?¹³ Was not Li Po the most famous of the Eight Immortals of the Wine-cup, and some of his best poetry written when he was stupefied with wine? Like that Sung official Chang Fang-ping, he was a hundred-cup man. When Chang used to go off on a drinking spree, he did not boast about the number of cups he would empty, but the number of days he would spend with the wine bottles. Yet even Chang might have appeared a model of sobriety compared with the third century poet Liu Ling. Liu used to travel the country seated in a cart with a huge jar of wine and a gravedigger for company. Before he set off, the poet gave his gravedigger his simple instructions: 'When I am dead, bury me!'

Behind this poetic propensity towards the bottle seems to have lurked the idea that wine helped the writer to reach that moment of truth, that instant of vision, when the shadow between the flickering images of the mind and the characters available to express it had reached its thinnest. In such a way did the French poet Rimbaud, following Baudelaire, wait in a state of almost complete intoxication for the divine vision which he believed would come to him when he had destroyed his ego in a last horrible debauch.

Whether Yu Hsuan-chi was any more conscious of this justificatory theory than many of her fellow poets may be doubted. But she was the life and soul of many parties held within the red walls of the nunnery. The young Ch'angan 'bloods' were glad to climb up from the city to listen to the poems of this remarkable nun who was still in her twenties. They liked to gossip and drink wine with so beautiful a woman and, if they had the chance, spend an hour or so with her at even closer quarters on a straw mattress.

And not only the gallants came, but men of rank and wealth who held important official posts in the capital. Scholars and poets came to talk with her, just as in ancient Athens Pericles

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had talked with Aspasia and the wise Socrates had sought the company of Diotima. 'The courtesan,' as Lecky reminds us, 'was the one free woman of Athens, and she often availed herself of her freedom to acquire a degree of knowledge which enabled her to add to her other charms an intense intellectual fascination. Gathering around her the most brilliant artists, poets, historians, and philosophers, she flung herself unreservedly into the intellectual and aesthetic enthusiasms of her time, and soon became the centre of a literary society of matchless splendour.'¹⁴

In a similar way was Yu Hsuan-chi a free woman in ninth century China. In no other way could she have found an outlet for her love, her learning, her poetry and her overwhelming zest for life.

Among her lovers was a scar-faced eccentric named Wen Fei-t'ing. He too—need we say it?—was a poet, in an age when as a Chinese critic once remarked 'whoever was a man, was a poet'.¹⁵ He too was fond wine; his friends were to be found in all the thieves' kitchens of Ch'angan. In flouting convention he got himself heartily disliked by the respectable; but his various misfortunes and vagabond companions endeared him to Yu Hsuan-chi. Wen called her his Moon Fairy and addressed poems to her. He talked of the great world still unexplored while the years were slipping by. In his uncouth, exciting presence Hsuan-chi found the life of a religieuse less appealing. She contrasted its placid monotony with the excitements of travel with such a man. Quickly she made up her mind, and attached herself to Wen Fei-t'ing as his mistress.

They must have been practically the oddest couple ever seen on the pathways of Shensi as they set off for Wen's home town of T'aiyuan. It was certainly a busy time for the inn-keepers on the way, while a trail of unpaid bills marked the route of the two poets and the stream of students and malcontents who trailed after them to watch the fun. Not every day were a famous Beauty and a notorious Beast seen together on the

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public highway—with the eyes of the disapproving provincial authorities upon them.

It appears that Wen Fei-t'ing's appearance at his ancestral home was as unwelcome as that of Rimbaud had been to Verlaine's respectable father-in-law. The poet soon forsook inhospitable T'aiyuan to embark on what was the equivalent in T'ai. times of the European Grand Tour—a journey along the Yangtse River. With him, carrying her lute, her paper and writing brushes, went Yu Hsuan-chi.

The details of that journey we do not know. The couple must have travelled south overland from Ch'angan towards the great river, and probably embarked in the neighbourhood of Kueichou. Then as they floated slowly seawards Yu Hsuan-chi, like Tu Fu and so many others before and after her, wrote poems, in typically Chinese fashion, commemorating various historical and legendary happenings which had taken place, or were supposed to have taken place, along the river.

Yet few things more marvellous had happened in times past than the fact that this abandoned concubine, this unwilling nun, should be travelling as only men travelled in those days—her cloister abandoned for the sake of adventure. It was incredible; it was without precedent. Little wonder was it that when she returned to Ch'angan she was more famous than she had ever been.

Wen Fei-t'ing seems to have left her soon after the poetic pair got back to Ch'angan after their riotous tour. Hsuan-chi appears to have taken an apartment in the capital's West End, where she continued her drinking and writing and chess-playing with the distinguished scholars and poets who paid her visits. She must have been a literary lioness rather like Madame de Staël at Coppet.

But she did not give up her old friends. Her former lovers, the young wasters of yesterday, were the slightly older wasters of today. They still came along to drink and cuddle and gossip about old times, and she did not slam the door in their

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wine-sodden faces. If it was only human of her to remain on friendly terms with old companions, it was equally human for the more respectable scholars and poets to cease frequenting the home of a woman who entertained the riff-raff as well as the élite.

Perhaps, too, her adventures and dissipation had tarnished her beauty. She was no longer in that first flush of womanhood and, when almost anyone could have her for the asking, her favours did not appear quite so desirable as they had once been.

Slowly, inevitably, she was dragged down to the level of the lowest company she kept. Her influential friends came to see her no more; and when there was no longer the likelihood of discovering an official in her arms, the city police began to treat her as an undesirable member of the community. It became increasingly difficult to regard her as different from the common women of easy virtue who haunted the ill-lit streets.

Without a protector, it was dangerous for Yu Hsuan-chi to do what she did—namely, antagonize the police authorities. She came into conflict with a minor constable who was responsible for order in her area, refusing to pay him the customary bribes. It was unwise to make so petty and spiteful an enemy.

These last days were unhappy ones for Hsuan-chi. During them, she wrote her most famous poem, 'Selling Wilted Peonies', which gave Genevieve Wimsatt the title for her biographical study. In this poem she summed up the story of her frustrated life.

The last act took place in the Nunnery of Boundless Contentment to which she had returned from her Ch'angan apartment. Perhaps she hoped to grow resigned to the meditative life as she grew older, and to end her days in peace among the mountains. She was still popular at the monastery, and apparently important enough to have a pretty maid to wait on her. But if she dreamed of unruffled peace and silence after so

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much action, the dreams did not last long. The end came with vicious speed.

The maid who attended her was murdered, and she was accused of the crime. The police claimed that Yu Hsuan-chi had been jealous of the young girl's fresh beauty, had beaten her to death and buried her in the nunnery garden, where the body was found.

Before the examining magistrate Hsuan-chi stoutly protested her innocence; but she had no money to plead her cause and no influential lovers to protect her from the sentence of a magistrate who had vowed to rid the city of undesirables. Under torture¹⁶ she acknowledged her guilt. It is true that without such a confession the magistrate could not have sentenced her under Chinese law; it is equally true that if the torture was protracted and painful enough confession leading to rapid death was a pleasure.

When on that autumn day she knelt on the cobbles of the square and the executioner pulled her head forward and bared her neck for the sword, Yu Hsuan-chi was not quite thirty; but in the things she had done and seen she had outlived Methuselah.

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The Recluse of the Eastern Slope

SU TUNG-PO

SU TUNG-PO¹ was the kind of man Li Po would like to have been: a poet who was also a great official, and thus able to play his part in the machinations of government in a way that Li Po could only dream about. Nor was Li Po's name the 'Banished Immortal' a measure of the difference between them. For it was known—at least to those who were learned in such mysteries—that Su Tung-po was also a spirit on loan to the world. A monk once found him asleep on a mountainside above Hangchow and saw on the poet's naked back seven moles resembling the stars of the Great Bear—a sign of his divinity. And in the early part of the twelfth century ten years after Tung-po had died, a Taoist necromancer caught a glimpse of him in his new role of Minister of Literature to the court of the gods.

Perhaps from the start one might have expected a son born to the well-established scholarly Su family would have it in him to do well. Su Tung-po, or Su Shih, to give him his family name, was born in Szechwan in 1036 in a town lying on the road from Kiating to the provincial capital of Ch'engtu.

His uncle was an official and his father Su Shun, although he had not passed the examinations, was of some repute as a man of letters. Su Shih proved an apt pupil at school and as the years rolled by soon found himself practising calligraphy and memorising the classics preparatory to sitting for his degree. His younger brother Su Che companioned him in these

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studies, and the brilliance showed by these youngsters was probably some compensation to their father for his own failure to satisfy the examiners.

When Su Shih was ready to go to the capital for the examinations, his parents married him to a local girl two years younger than himself. This was done as a precaution against his being 'snapped up' by some wealthy merchant with an unmarried daughter on his hands if Su should be fortunate enough to come out near the top of the examination lists. Many a brilliant youth had been married off in this way and lived to regret it!

From the ordeal in the capital both the Su brothers emerged with flying colours. Ou-yang Hsiu, one of China's greatest scholars, was Head of the Board of Examiners, and was tremendously impressed by Su Shih's papers which he felt entitled the student to first place. Unfortunately for Su Shih, the examiner thought his essays—they were all submitted anonymously as in our own university examinations—were the work of a friend of his, and cautiously relegated the essayist to second place to avoid the charge of favouritism.

In April 1057, twenty-year old Su Shih received the degree of *chin shih*—how Li Po would have loved the honour!—and everyone prophesied a magnificent future for this young scholar. People took their cue from the generous Ou-yang Hsiu, who foretold the day when his own name would be forgotten in the glory that would surround the achievements of Su Shih.

This was a memorable time for the Su brothers, when, as Su Shih later wrote,

'Both inspired by the high hopes of youth,
With a thousand words from our pens
And ten thousand volumes in our breasts,
We thought it not difficult to make our Emperor the
best. . . .'²

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But the magnificent future that had been foretold did not come at once. Su Shih's first official appointment was that of assistant magistrate at Fenghsiang in Shensi. This was towards the end of the year 1061. His mother had died while he was distinguishing himself in the examinations, and his father and brother had given up their Szechwan house and were living in K'aifeng. Su Shih did not like being parted from his brother, and they wrote each other numerous letters and poems. Even though they were both on the threshold of their careers, the picture of an idyllic retirement when they would 'sleep in opposite beds and listen to the rain in the night' is the theme of Su Shih's first melancholy letter. He knew what it was to be homesick.

Then, too, the life of an official was not the most fascinating of occupations. 'Every day,' he wrote his brother in 1063, 'I carry on the daily duties, without asking what they are for. Before a scholar obtains an office, he worries about obtaining it, and if after obtaining it he worries about losing it, what is to be the end of such a life?'

Yet it had its interesting moments and its little triumphs. During a severe drought which threatened the crops in the surrounding countryside, Su Shih had not only prayed to and pleaded with the Dragon God responsible, but had been astute enough to discover that an earlier dynasty had been responsible for depriving the deity of high rank. Since this was almost certainly the reason for the Dragon God's displeasure, Su Shih memorialised the throne requesting a dukedom for the Dragon God. This was granted, and immediately the drought ended. The people of Fenghsiang could probably have told of other incidents too where Su Shih had been more than a match for devils.

Nevertheless, Su Shih was glad to get back to the capital and be given a post in the Department of History in 1065. Here there were fine collections of manuscripts and paintings, and opportunities for him to do research in the imperial library.

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But in the same year his young wife died, and very soon afterwards his father. With the melancholy cargo of coffins, the two brothers set out on the long boat journey back to Szechwan and the family grave.

The usual two years of obligatory mourning followed. When that period was up, Su Shih married a first cousin of his late wife, and then both brothers with their families turned their backs on the beautiful Land of the Four Rivers, and started back to K'aifeng. They arrived in 1069, and were immediately caught up in a political furore.

If there is one thing duller than a live political issue that lies outside one's personal interests, it is a political issue that died long ago. Let the dead politicians bury their own issues; we have too many of our own. While it is interesting to recall that the Chinese were arguing economic theory at a time when the Normans were conquering England, there is no point in a sketch like this in trying to summarise the details of the reform movement which had just been started by that *bête noire* of the Confucian ruling class, Wang An-shih.

Some historians see him as a socialist planner born out of his time; a man who tried, in the teeth of reactionary opposition, to check the growing power of the landlords and establish a state monopoly in place of private oligopoly. Other writers, like Lin Yu-tang, regard him as a ruthless dictator who never hesitated to stifle opposition, and whose so-called reforms did more harm than good to the people. We take our own prejudices with us when we interpret the past. Possibly the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes, and depends a great deal on which groups within the whole society have the historian's main sympathy. 'Although,' writes C. P. Fitzgerald, 'the historians have recorded every fact or opinion which can discredit the policy of Wang An-shih, they have not been able to conceal certain evidence which is in its favour.'³

It seems clear enough that Wang An-shih antagonised just

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about every scholar-official with any reputation in the capital, including the Su brothers. Gradually he replaced the men of calibre with minions of his own. But this antagonism may not have been due so much to the demerits of his ideas as to the inflated value he placed on his own scholarship, his utter disregard of precedent (which was enough to horrify any official worth the name), and his thoroughly unprepossessing appearance.

For Wang An-shih was not a charming well-mannered gentleman presenting a new economic and financial programme. He was no Maynard Keynes with the breeding of a traditional conservative and the brilliant mind of a progressive liberal, making the most 'outrageous' doctrines seem palatable. Far from it. In appearance he was much more like a Tory squire's mental picture of a Communist agitator.

Su Shun, the father of Su Shih, in a famous essay, seems to take the view that no one looking as ugly and dirty as Wang An-shih could possibly contribute anything to the common good. 'It is natural for a man to want to wash his face when it is dirty and to send his filthy garments to the laundry. Not so with this man! He wears a barbarian's robe and eats the food of pigs and dogs and discusses poetry and history with a convict's unshaved head and unwashed face. Now is this natural? A man who does not act according to common human nature must be a great hypocrite and a scheming intriguer.'⁴

To the well-mannered, face-saving Chinese official, Wang was an anomaly. Yet there was no gainsaying either his talents or his utter lack of interest in personal reward. For a quarter of a century he had refused official advancement, and remained in a quiet backwater as a magistrate—though even there he had shown remarkable initiative as a planner.

In 1060 he had arrived in K'aifeng to serve on the Financial Board where he got busy on his plans for tax reforms. When the young Emperor Shen Tsung succeeded to the throne, Wang An-shih's promotion was rapid. In 1069, the year the

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Su brothers came back from their trip to the west, the reforms began. They were intended to reorganize the finances of the empire, and increase the tax yield in the provinces to finance the continuing wars against the northern tribes.

This, as I have suggested, is no place to go into details. Only Su Shih's protests and opposition concern us; and these must be referred to briefly, since they were the reason for his exile.

In February 1070, and again a year later, Su Shih sent the equivalent of a couple of political pamphlets to the young emperor. These criticised the exorbitant interest which peasants had to pay on government loans, and the way they were forced to take up these loans. They compared the dictatorial suppression of free speech under Wang An-shih with the enlightened and benevolent liberalism of the Sage Rulers. They stressed the inflationary price spiral and the growing indignation of the people at the oppression of the government. Surely, Su Shih argued, some rumours of discontent had reached the throne; and where there was so much smoke there was at least the suspicion of fire.

The case which thirty-two-year old Su Shih put with passion and eloquence would have commanded the assent of his greatest contemporaries; though like most political polemics it was more of an attempt to discredit the Wang An-shih clique than to present a reasoned case for a new policy. Wang An-shih did at least try to do something about China's age-old land problem. I do not think it is too unkind to suggest that many of those who condemned his policies would have done nothing at all in his place. Apathy was not an uncommon attribute of the Chinese official.

However this may be, Wang An-shih's arrogance would have put him in the wrong even if his political and economic acts had been above reproach. Being a good scholar, he came to regard himself as the touchstone of learning. He wrote commentaries on the Confucian classics and ordered that they should be regarded as authoritative as the texts themselves.

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This was too much. It virtually ensured that no economic theory he supported, no law he promulgated, and no reform he carried through would ever receive consideration on its merits from the scholar class. His backing alone would be enough to discredit it. For Wang An-shih's claim to encyclopedic knowledge in fields as far apart as philology and finance, Su Shih and his friends had the same contempt as Lord Macaulay had for 'the slovenly omniscience of Brougham'.

For that contempt Su Shih had to pay—but not dearly. In July 1071 he was sent to take up a post as deputy magistrate in the city of Hangchow. No poet could have found a more beautiful spot in all China. And soon after his arrival Su Shih was writing:

‘Where better could I settle and find a home
Than such a place with peerless lake and hill?’

This same Venice of the East was two hundred years later to enchant Marco Polo with its vast fleet of junks, its magnificent lagoons, its gardens and pavilions, and the loveliest ladies on earth. Even in the fourteenth century a much-travelled friar had no hesitation in calling it ‘the greatest city in the whole world’.⁵

In Su Shih's time Hangchow may have been less grand than it was to be later, but it was no less beautiful. The poet-official was soon caught up in its gay life. He went boating on the lakes with his numerous friends. He feasted at official receptions, and flirted with the courtesans. In and around Hangchow there was a temple for every day of the year, and frequently Su Shih liked to wander off to visit the monks and priests, to talk over Buddhist doctrines and exchange poems with these men who were honoured by his company.

Su Shih's poetry had already earned him a reputation. Copies of his verses were treasured and exchanged and discussed wherever men of letters got together. Many of his poems were

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enclosed in letters to his friends and to his brother in Tsinan. Indeed many of them were letters; since poetry was then an elegant art practised between gentlemen, much as the habit of writing Latin verses was in England in days gone by.

Seldom, however, is life all delight. No magistrate with any regard at all for his duties could spend all his time boating and strolling on the hillsides and idly watching that combination of mountain and water that makes up the Chinese word for landscape. The prisons were far from being empty. There were men to be flogged and beheaded. There were papers to be signed. There were the queues of people waiting to see the local representative of the Son of Heaven. It was hard to go indoors out of the sunshine; harder still to be the representative of a law that was often harsh.

‘On New Year’s Eve I should go home early,
But am by official duties detained.
With tears in my eyes I hold my brush,
And feel sorry for those in chains.
The poor are trying to make their living,
But fall into the clutches of the law.
I, too, cling to an official job,
And carry on against my wish for rest. . . .’

Many of his poems during these years mentioned the sufferings of the people, and his accusers were able to cite them against him at his trial. He was sensitive to suffering; and he was subject to melancholy moods which alternated with periods of gay light-heartedness. These latter sometimes kept him company even on the bench.

Once, when listening to a case where a monk from one of the temples was accused of murdering a harlot with whom he had fallen passionately in love and on whom he had lavished the little wealth he possessed, Su Shih wrote the death-sentence in verse:

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'Away from here, you bald-headed daisy!
In vain you took the vow of celibacy,
Reduced yourself to this ragged shape
By your unmonkish profligacy.
By your cruel fists you killed your love.
What's illusion now, and what reality?
Your arm bears witness to love's longing,
This time you shall pay love's penalty.'

On far more occasions, however, Su Shih's poetry reflected that twofold attitude to life which has so often paralysed the intellectual and brought the charge of dilettantism. He had that yearning to escape from the challenges, exasperations and pettiness of the political scene and cultivate his own garden.

'For years I have been going through a struggle,
And now I gradually feel the Master prevails.
I want to find a farm of five acres,
And clear all vexations from my breast. . . .'

Here was nothing new. Since the Chinese first began to write their history in the form of legends, the wise emperors and the greatest officials had shared an ambitious dream. They did not yearn for power or wealth or a name in lights, but for the day when they could hang up their dragon robes and their mandarin caps, and withdraw to a quiet hermitage among the mountains where they would find contentment in a way of life ordained them by the gods. Indeed, in T'ang times the attractions of the meditative life had been so great that 'officials saw, with dismay, the business of the state impeded by the withdrawal of so many from the active population'.⁶

As it happened, Su Shih's dream was not so far away. In 1074 his term at Hangchow came to an end, and he went at his own request to an impoverished area near Ts'ingtao. After two years here he was transferred to Suchow on the Yellow River, where his already great popularity was increased by the steps he took to avert a flood disaster.

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Popularity, however, was not enough to live on. The civil servants of those days also had their troubles in times of rising prices, and we can have a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties which Su Shih's wife had to confront in feeding her family.

Wonderful though it was to have a head of the family whose poems and reputation were the talk of China, this did not make it any easier to manage. He had never made a habit of regular saving. 'After being in the service for nineteen years,' wrote Su Shih, 'I am becoming poorer every day and can no longer live as I used to. When I came over to be magistrate of Kiaochow, I thought at least that I would not have to starve, but the pantry is bare, and we have to live frugally. I often go out with a fellow magistrate along the ancient city walls, and pick the medlar and the chrysanthemum in the abandoned gardens and eat them. Then we feel our bellies and laugh.'⁷

Then in 1079 he was impeached for disloyalty to the emperor and for criticising the workings of the government. The evidence was culled and twisted from his writings: where characters had double and treble meanings and allusions were ambiguous, the worst was always suspected.

But Su Shih's real fault was that he had mentioned with disfavour in his reports to the throne the unqualified, unscholarly upstarts who had succeeded to the spoils of office after Wang An-shih's dismissal in 1076. These angry men were resolved to make Su Shih pay for his insolence; and the fact that his poetry had ranged beyond descriptions of landscapes and the other approved themes to tell of conscript labour and the hunger of peasant farmers could be taken to imply that Su Shih was not entirely satisfied with the imperial benevolence, and was hinting that the emperor and his advisers were not modelling their decrees on those of the Sage Rulers.

After a ridiculous trial and four months in prison, Su Shih was banished to the little town of Huangchow on the Yangtse, about sixty miles east of Hankow. With him went his eldest

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son—now a man of twenty-one—the rest of the family following at their leisure.

Now it was that Su Shih became Su Tung-po or Su the Recluse of the Eastern Slope. He found himself living in a humble house overlooking the eternally changing moods of the clouds, the river and the hills. Like Emile Zola after him, he could say that the world virtually ended at the bottom of his garden. In this new home he studied Buddhism and budgeting, for the little money he had had to go a long way.

He devised an ingenious system. He divided his monthly allowance into thirty equal parts. This money, which was in the form of 'cash' with a hole in the middle of each coin, he threaded on thirty strings which he hung from the roof, where they could be reached only with a long pole. Each day Tung-po took one of these down, and then hid the pole until the following day. It was, to say the least, a novel way of living one day at a time!

It was not long before Tung-po obtained ten acres of land and started farming. It was exhausting work in the early stages. His poems begin to relate the joys of sweet rest after a day in the fields, of building a pond with the help of kindly neighbours, of gathering hay with the wind and sun tanning his cheeks. He found deep satisfaction in tilling the good earth and, when the work was done, in gossiping with his rural friends. He became an accomplished cook; and in many a Chinese restaurant have I enjoyed fish cooked as Tung-po used to cook it—with a wonderful onion and ginger sauce.

When the concubine who had been his wife's maid bore him a son, Tung-po told of his hopes for the child.

'All people wish their children to be brilliant,
But I have suffered from brilliance all my life.
May you, my son, grow up dumb and stupid,
And, free from calamities, end up as a premier.'

Three years in so pleasant a wilderness helped to instil in him

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that philosophy of poverty and contentment which we in the West so often associate with the best Chinese minds. Around the walls of his simple home Tung-po hung up mottoes as constant reminders that great mansions and splendid carriages often led to colds and rickety legs; that rich food produced ulcers, and lovely courtesans a worse ailment still.

As one would perhaps expect, Tung-po began to reflect seriously about the Taoist immortals of old, and to make tentative plans for alchemical experiments. He practised yoga postures to give him better control over his body; and these almost certainly gave him better health, even if they did not give him the power to live for ever.

Yet in all such pursuits Tung-po followed the doctrine of the mean. He was moderate in all his beliefs, and never failed to enjoy life day by day. Friends were always dropping in, and he kept up a correspondence with the most celebrated of his contemporaries. Moonlight, music and wine were his delights. Compared with Li Po he was abstemious; yet there were bright mornings when he was found lying tipsy in the grass, wet with dew, and in danger of being trodden on by some grazing water-buffalo.

When his banishment came to an end and the empress dowager, acting as regent for the new emperor, recalled him to the capital, Su Tung-po did not regard his return to favour as an unmixed blessing. The 'village of scoundrels', as he persisted in calling the capital, now appealed to him far less than it had done when he was an ambitious Szechwanese lad with a name to make. Yet to hear was to obey. Taking his family in tow he said farewell to the little farm where he had been so happy.

Back in K'aifeng, he was rapidly promoted under the protection of an empress who had a high regard for his talents, and who wished to make away with the remaining policies of the Wang An-shih clique. Tung Po's job was to draft the imperial decrees according to the classical pattern; and clerks in

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the office after he left used to recall the ease with which he wrote them. The references and allusions which other occupants of the post had to look up in the libraries were all neatly pigeon-holed in his mind.

The obituary he wrote following Wang An-shih's death in April 1086 had a delightful ambiguity. Wang, he said, 'encompassed the entire literature of the six arts and subjected them to his own judgment. Looking down upon the heritage of the hundred philosophers, he founded a new school. . . .' Useless though it be to speculate, one wonders whether Wang himself would have taken it as a back-handed compliment!

In two and a half years at court, Tung-po made many enemies as well as many friends. The Chinese court which for centuries had been a breeding ground for palace revolutions was a place where wheels turned endlessly within wheels, and where only the astute, ambitious, full-time politician could hope to survive for long—and then only if he greased the wheels sufficiently.

If Su Tung-po's heart had ever been in this business of political bureaucracy, his idyllic years away from 'the village of scoundrels' had made him see this sordid chicanery for what it was. He preferred writing poetry and painting sprays of bamboo leaves with quick strokes of his brush to jockeying for a position he did not really want.

This attitude of mind made Su Tung-po a vigorous and outspoken critic of the ubiquitous corruption and misrule. He was not, as were so many professional politicians, on the defensive; for he did not look upon dismissal from his high office as a calamity which had to be feared. On the contrary. More than once he had urged the empress to let him take up a post in the provinces; but she had taken his part against his critics. So he continued to expose the petty politicians around him, comparing them to 'market flies which swarm wherever there is a refuse-heap', until at last they made it so hot for him that the empress agreed to let him go.

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In April 1089 Su Tung-po returned to Hangchow as Governor of West Chekiang.

Here he was busier than he had ever been in his life before. 'In the short space of one and a half years', writes Lin Yutang, 'he put through measures of public health and sanitation for the city, including a clean water system and a hospital, dredged the salt canals, reconstructed the West Lake, successfully stabilised the price of grain, and single-handedly and passionately worked for famine relief against the colossal indifference of officials at the court and in the neighbouring provinces.'⁸ Such is a greatly condensed version of his achievements in the teeth of apathy and obstruction. Yet it is difficult for anyone who has never experienced Chinese bureaucracy at its worst to visualize just how obstructive officialdom in that country can be. The man on the spot sees the present problems and the disasters looming ahead if action is not taken immediately. The official in the capital is concerned rather with the effect of importunate pleas for money and resources on the neatly arranged world of paper and seals and exquisite calligraphy.

Su Tung-po was now the man on the spot, and he always remembered the things he saw. He had joked before about his own penury; but now he saw old men and women labouring hopelessly in flooded fields, eating the food they gave their animals, lying dead of hunger by the roadside. He demanded rice for the people. In report after report he urged action. But this was China. There had been periodic famines ever since men and women started to grow crops. There would be famines a thousand years hence. It was nothing new. Even during the fifty odd years of his own life there had been numerous famines; but never before had there been one so close to his own eyes. The people looked to him, and he could not fail the people.

He went on battling for them after he returned to the capital in February 1091, and it was largely due to him that the

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debts owed by the peasants under Wang An-shih's farm loan programme were forgiven. The famine went on through the following year, and Tung-po saw its effects in other towns.

The picture of the people's sufferings haunted him through all the reports he wrote—reports whose phrases have been echoed by other observers down to the present day. 'There are farms without owners, and owners without food. Those who have food are without seeds, and those who have seeds have no buffaloes. Those who are not dead look like ghosts.'

In the capital there were more things than famine to worry about. The professional politicians did not depend on the votes of the starving for their livelihood, but on being in with the right people at the right time. And just at this moment the empress dowager died and everyone changed step. Party politics are dull enough at the time: to resurrect dead squabbles is unforgivable. All we need know is that a complete *volte-face* had taken place. Everyone who had criticised Wang An-shih and later come back into favour—like Su Tung-po in 1086—was now in 1094 accused of 'slandering the deceased emperor'. What had been good in the last decade was now, in the twinkling of an eye, to be judged bad. The ministers who had served their country faithfully under the regency of the empress were now exiled. Among the first to go was Su Tung-po.

In the year the empress died, Tung-po had also lost his wife. This good lady who had accompanied him from far Szechwan and cherished him through all his ups and downs died when her husband was at the apex of his political career, and could possibly have been prime minister for the asking. Now, in 1094, accompanied by his son, Su Tung-po set off on the last lap of his wanderings—overland across the heart of China to his place of exile in the south.

Though the members of the court clique did their best to make the last years of the poet's life unhappy ones, Su Tung-po was far too much of a philosopher to find misery in years

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without responsibilities. True, he knew sadness and he experienced poverty; but he knew that he was no worse off than most of his friends. These friends the authorities could not take away. When he settled for a while in the neighbourhood of Canton, he could write about pleasant food and customs, kindly neighbours and officials who went out of their way to aid and befriend this distinguished scholar from the north.

It was in Huichow, not far from Canton, that Chao Yun his concubine died after bringing Tung-po much happiness. A devout Buddhist, she had served and loved the man who had transformed her from a servant to be his companion; and ever since the names of Su Tung-po and Chao Yun have been linked in story with their brief stay in Huichow after the death of the poet's wife. But Tung-po was not allowed to stay in Huichow much longer. There is a tale that a poem of his describing the delights of listening to temple bells while relaxing in the garden came to the ears of the court. 'Su Tung-po seems to be having a good time,' they murmured to one another. 'This time we must send him across the sea.'

To the Chinese of those days, Ultima Thule might well have been another name for the island of Hainan off South China's mainland. A Chinese settlement hugged the island coast; the rest was given over to aboriginal tribes. It was a grim abode for a man of culture who had not much longer to live.

Yet in a short time, though living in a leaking hut in a damp and wretched climate, Tung-po, the infinitely-adaptable scholar-poet, was making friends with the pigs and the peasants, and the poor monks and scholars who, like him, were forced to live on this desolate isle. There were times when he was nearly starving, and he joked about the Taoist way of abating hunger—by devouring sunbeams. It would have been hard to recognize the man who had been tutor to the emperor and instigator of great relief programmes in the humble peasant who still painted and wrote poems on such scraps of paper as

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he could find, making his own ink with soot from the fire. Here was a man who had known unforgettable things, and now waited for the kindness of death.

That Tung-po did not die on the island of Hainan was due solely to the death of the young Emperor Che Tsung in 1100. For six months his mother acted as regent, and in that time she undid as much of the harm done by her son and his ministers as she could. Su Tung-po and the other exiled officials who had shared his views were pardoned. He was free to end his days in peace.

It was a long arduous journey for an old man, this journey back to the Yangtse valley he knew so well. But it was too a triumphant one. Friends and officials made him welcome in town after town. They asked him for poems and autographs. They brought out their children to look upon one of their greatest contemporaries. It was a slow journey, punctuated by many stops *en route*, and at the end by death itself.

In June 1101 he was still travelling, though now he was ill with fever. Yet he had now nearly reached Changchow where, with the court's permission, he proposed to live out his days.

It was here, in this city on the Grand Canal, in July 1101 that Su Tung-po died in the midst of his grown-up family. He was sixty-four years of age.

Soon afterwards a court order attempted to destroy and ban his writings. It was a vain attempt; and merely started a hunt for his manuscripts which has gone on ever since.

Su Tung-po seemed possessed of all the graces. He was poet, artist, scholar, administrator, philosopher and wit: he was the friend of emperors and empresses and the companion of unlettered peasants. It used to be said that whenever the Emperor Shen Tsung's chopsticks paused half-way to his mouth, it was sure to be because he was reading a memorandum from Su Tung-po.

The charm of the poet's writings we in the West must take for granted. For it was these, after all those who had known

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and loved him had vanished from the earth, that kept his name evergreen in Chinese minds. There is indeed a story told of a Chinese scholar married to a beautiful wife. He was so entranced by Tung-po's poetry that he used to read it all night long, night after night, paying no heed to the lovely woman in his bed.

To be able to write with such charm as to accomplish that is perhaps to set the seal on one's achievement!

II



The Execrated Eunuch

WEI CHUNG-HSIEN

SITUATED in the Western Hills a few miles outside Peking is a building with the lovely name of *Pai Yun Tzu*, the Temple of the Azure Clouds. This beautiful temple, which cost a million taels to construct, stands by the side of a road along which the camels pad on their way to and from the western gates of Peking. A jewel in an exquisite setting, it perpetuates the infamous memory of one of China's most execrated men: the notorious eunuch who helped to bring about the downfall of the Ming dynasty.

Eunuchs had for long centuries exerted their influence on the Dragon Throne. Perhaps it was assumed that, deprived of their sexual powers and the ties of family life, these fat, beardless men with high-pitched voices would serve the emperor single-mindedly. Whatever the initial assumption may have been, the eunuchs rapidly became an institution, and exerted an influence on events out of all proportion to their numbers.

During the Han dynasty, as Eberhard reminds us,¹ eunuchs, who generally came from the poorer classes in the community, were supported by cliques who used the eunuchs' nearness to the throne to gain the imperial ear for themselves. Even the Queen of Fairyland whispered in the long ears of Bottom, and these cliques were far less particular than she. Lobbying is a familiar process to all of us nowadays. Business enterprises, welfare organizations and powerful associations of all kinds are always trying to influence state executives in one way

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or another. It was no different in the Han period in China.

In following centuries, the eunuchs were everlastingly involved in the crafty intrigues that went on behind the hanging curtains of the audience chamber and in the corridors of the harem. It was little wonder that they were called Palace Rats and Crows of Ill Omen.

Yet it was during the Ming dynasty, which lasted from 1368 to 1644, that the powers of the eunuchs were fully revealed—so much so, that one of the first reforms introduced by the following dynasty was one banning eunuchs from holding office and from personal access to the emperor. A good deal of the blame for the increase in the eunuchs' power must be attached to the Emperor Hsuan-te who, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, engaged some distinguished scholars to educate the three or four hundred eunuchs who resided at court and fit them for the various governmental posts they were usually expected to fill.

To educate a man is to increase his power over his environment. In the past, castration alone had frequently been a way to social betterment and political advancement. Many lads from the poorer homes had been forced to submit to castration before they were eight years old, since to become a eunuch was to be reasonably sure of a living. But these new proposals meant that castration was to be coupled with scholarship; the feet of the eunuchs were set on the stairway that could take them to the very pinnacle of power.

So favoured indeed was the position of the educated eunuch that some scholars who had passed their examinations had themselves castrated, by this means achieving a position of influence and a source of income which would otherwise have been utterly beyond their reach. As eunuchs, they were bribed by various pressure groups to obtain the emperor's support for schemes in which they were interested; while the emperor himself tried to use them as a check on the more powerful of his subjects.²

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In between emperor and pressure groups, the eunuchs flourished and grew ever more powerful. There were the bloodsuckers known as the Eight Tigers. There was the Chief Eunuch Liu Chin who, while the Emperor Wu Tsung was encouraged to spend his time in the harem, had full authority to issue the imperial decrees. 'The first important decree issued by Liu Chin,' writes Eberhard,³ 'resulted in the removal from office or the punishment or murder of over three hundred prominent persons, the leaders of the cliques opposed to him. He filled their posts with his own supporters, until all the higher posts in every department were in the hands of members of his group. He collected large sums of money, which he quite openly extracted from the provinces as a special tax for his own benefit. When later his house was searched there were found 240,000 bars and 57,800 pieces of gold, 791,800 ounces and 5,000,000 bars of silver, three bushels of precious stones, two gold cuirasses, 3,000 gold rings, and much else—of a total value exceeding the annual budget of the state! The treasure was to have been used to finance a revolt planned by Liu Chin and his supporters.'

So the Chief Eunuch Wei Chung-hsien, whose body was hacked to pieces before it could be decently buried in the magnificent mausoleum he had built, was heir to a long tradition of infamy.

Of his life before 1620 we know little. The brief biography in Hummel's *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*⁴ tells us that he was a native of Suning in Hopei Province, and was castrated as a young man to extricate himself from the payment of gambling debts. At this time his name may have been Li rather than Wei, and when he first gravitated to the court he did so under the name of Li Chin-chung. For some years he functioned as a minor official before rising to become Supervisor of Food to the chief concubine of the Heir Apparent.

It was in this capacity that Wei first came into close contact

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with the lad who had been born to this lady in 1605 and who was in 1620 to follow, in quick succession, his grandfather and father to the Dragon Throne. During the years when he should have been employed minding the kitchen expenses, the eunuch was quietly leading the youth into those dissolute pleasures which were later to establish Wei's authority over his royal master.

In 1620 when the Ming Emperor Wan Li—during whose reign the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci found hospitality at the Chinese Court—lay on his death-bed, the court had grown used to the power of the eunuchs; for the emperor had, during the forty-eight years of his reign, used them in preference to the officials who had secured their posts as a result of the official examinations. But with Wan Li's death the eunuchs, aided by the women of the palace, asserted themselves still further.

Wan Li's sons and heir—whose life had been attempted by agents of his father's favourite concubine while Wan Li was still alive—reigned for a couple of months and then died suddenly of arsenic poisoning. There was no coroner's inquest. And though, during his final agonies, the poor emperor was saluted with cries of 'May you live for ten thousand years!', these were even more meaningless than usual. The dragon whose proud duty it was to convey the souls of emperors to their final abode did not have to wait long outside the palace walls.

At once the gloves were off. The deceased emperor's favourite, Mistress Li, who had tried in vain to get herself declared empress, allied herself with Wei Chin-chung who was soon to be known as Wei Chung-hsien or Wei the Loyal and Good. 'These two,' write Backhouse and Bland in their fascinating *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking* which has become the indispensable source book of the period, 'and their troop of eunuchs now held the Palace against all comers, kept close watch on the Heir to the throne, and issued orders for-

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bidding the usual mourning of Ministers at the deceased Sovereign's bier.'⁵

If the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, as one of the watchwords of our own times declares, it is to the censors that China owes her final release from the Ming eunuchs. In Chinese history the censors have enjoyed a unique position in courts that were too often peopled with sycophants and power-lovers. They were usually men of high reputation in classical learning and historical knowledge; and they were paid to criticize (tactfully where possible!) the imperial edicts and make recommendations to the throne on matters affecting the healthy life of the empire. The historian Ssu-ma Kuang who lived in the Sung dynasty writes thus about the office of censor: 'His was a sacred trust; and for this post it was necessary to choose men of resolution and of liberal minds, who could gauge the relative importance of events and entirely subordinate their own interests to those of the commonwealth. Seekers after notoriety or wealth found no place in their ranks.'⁶

The poet Tu Fu had been a censor, and out of his own somewhat unfortunate experience he handed down a word picture of the way the ideal emperor should listen to the criticisms of the censorate. He should stand 'with hands folded on his breast, receiving the silken tribute of admonition and reproof'.⁷

Unhappily there were many emperors whose behaviour diverged from the ideal expected of them. There were many occasions on which the censors suffered the bamboo, banishment or still severer punishment for carrying out their duties. They were free to express their horror of tyranny and bad government; but they were not immune, as we shall quickly see, from the vengeance of those whose policies they were bold enough to condemn. More than once a courageous censor had been known to take his own life after saying what he had to say. Few of these responsible officials were under any illusion about the dangers of their honourable profession.

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It is difficult to believe that the eunuchs would not have had their way if censors like the martyred Yang Lien and Tso Kuang-tou had not remembered the duties of their office. Certainly the two sons of the poisoned T'ai Ch'ang would scarcely have survived to become the last two rulers of an ill-fated dynasty if Mistress Li and Wei Chung-hsien had been unopposed. We are told that the two plotters made an attempt to smuggle Hsi Tsung out of the Forbidden City when the censor Yang Lien demanded that this new occupant of the throne should receive the homage due to him from the assembled court. This attempt failed, and Hsi Tsung, a small, rather feeble boy of fifteen, became the new emperor.

Even at this age he was older than the young Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had been when he took over the control of Ch'in in 247 B.C. But what a difference there was between the two boys! The one had a ruthless driving power and insatiable ambition which led him to remould an empire; while Hsi Tsung, weak and ineffectual, brought up among the intrigues of a court that had so quickly disposed of his father, could look nowhere for protection but to the head eunuch Wei Chung-hsien, whom he trusted like a father, and to his foster-mother the Lady K'o, who had nursed him as a child and whose wickedness was eventually to bring her a well-merited reward.

It has been said that the immorality of the Chinese court was not accidental, but largely calculated. There was a minister in the Sung period who was impeached in these words: 'He corrupted the Emperor's character with women and actresses and led him astray with immoral thoughts and suggestions.'⁸ The palace courtiers were well aware that energetic administration and sexual dissipation did not go together. Deliberately they had formed the habit of encouraging the heirs to the throne from their earliest days to frequent the orgies arranged for them by the eunuchs and to gratify their sexual impulses; they were always on the look out for

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beautiful young ladies for the imperial bed who could still further stimulate the emperor's passions. There were times indeed when the pavilions of the Forbidden City resembled those schools of vice which flourished with temple worship in ancient Greece, in cities like Abydos, Lesbos and Miletus.

Wei Chung-hsien and the Lady K'o (who had replaced Mistress Li in the inner sanctum of the wicked) made use of Hsi Tsung's sexual weaknesses where necessary; but often there was no need to provide any special stimulus since the young emperor had a keen interest in carpentry, and was contented enough to spend his time at his work-bench and leave the administration of his empire to those who desired the task more than he did.

Yet, when a year after his accession Hsi Tsung decided to marry, his powerful advisers slipped up badly; for the girl he married was to be a thorn in their flesh which all their plotting could not remove.

In 1621 the girl who at the age of six was found abandoned in a Honan street was fifteen years old. Her name was Precious Pearl. In delightful detail Backhouse and Bland tell the story of the way she was selected to be the imperial consort.

This high rank was to be awarded to the winner of an empire-wide Beauty Contest. All maidens between the ages of thirteen and sixteen were eligible to enter, and the eunuchs, who were familiar with the standards required in the harem, did the weeding out in the first rounds of the contest. When only four thousand competitors were left, the senior eunuchs noted down the measurements of each girl, eliminating those whose speaking voices were in any way harsh or unpleasant. By this time the four thousand had been halved.

Then followed a deportment test, each of the girls being required to walk a hundred paces. This proved too exacting for another thousand. The remainder proceeded to the Inner Palace where they were stripped and scrutinised and prodded, rather like cattle in the market, by the discreet and elderly

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women who resided therein. At the end of this rigorous search for blemishes three hundred were retained on probation as handmaidens; but a month was enough to decide which of these girls showed signs of being stubborn or frivolous, and all such were sent away. There remained fifty; and all these were made imperial concubines. At the head of the list was the erstwhile orphan Precious Pearl.

The chosen fifty were now ushered into the presence of that exalted personage the Senior Concubine, who tested them in calligraphy and the other accomplishments which young ladies were expected to possess in seventeenth century China. Precious Pearl, who had as a child been adopted by a kindly scholar, did well in this test. She was sent forward with two other girls for the final scrutiny of their charms. They went into the presence of the emperor, who sat on his throne with one eye on the ever-present Lady K'o.

Chinese historians commend the choice Hsi Tsung made that day—the most sensible action of his wretched life. There was now an empress in the innermost courtyards who could see the eunuch-ridden court for what it was.

At this time the authority of the Chief Eunuch was at its height. Under his despotic rule the last vestiges of popular sympathy for the Mings were fast disappearing; and Wei Chung-hsien's government was paving the way for the Manchu conquest of China. Honours were showered on the eunuch by the puppet emperor, and great provincial officials sought the favour of the castrated one on bended knee.

In 1626 the Governor of Chekiang asked permission—probably following up a suggestion from Wei Chung-hsien himself—to erect a temple in the Chief Eunuch's honour at West Lake, Hangchow. Others quickly followed, and before the year was out Wei was given the new rank of 'Exalted Duke'.

'In nearly every province shrines were erected to him during his lifetime and he was worshipped as a deity. In Kiangsi a temple which had been built centuries before, in honour of

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one of the most eminent disciples of Confucius, was dismantled, and Wei Chung-hsien's tablet was set up in its central hall. He was likened to the Sage for virtue and learning: nay, his merits were even exalted beyond those of the Sage, and he was accorded the highest place in the national Pantheon. . . . The eunuch was called Lord of Nine Thousand Years, and the Emperor's decrees, which Wei invariably drafted, began with the words: "We and our eunuch Minister decree as follow. . . ." '9

But not all China called Wei the Lord of Nine Thousand years. Some used their eyes and tongues to better effect and spoke their minds with courage. One of them was the censor Yang Lien who had retired from the court after the boy emperor had been enthroned to cultivate his garden in the traditional manner of disillusioned Chinese scholars, who so often preferred

'the hut
That from the mountain's side,
Views wilds, and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown. . . .'

to the intrigues and face-saving double-talk that made up so much of the life at court. Po Chu-i, Su Tung-po and scores of other scholars and poets exemplify in their lives this love of retirement from the bustle of administration which, throughout Chinese history, has been a typical characteristic of the wise scholar.

There are some things, however, that have to be said and done whatever the cost, and the best men in every age have discovered that truth for themselves. In 1624 Yang Lien returned to Peking to be murdered in the torture-chambers of the imperial prison. They drove nails into his ears and piled great sacks of earth on his broken body until no one could recognize him any longer. But the memorial he sent to the Emperor Hsi Tsung has come down to us, making the name

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of Yang Lien immortal as one who was not afraid to withstand tyrants and condemn their tyranny.

Wei Chung-hsien changed colour when he read the powerful denunciation of his misrule. He was accused of converting the court into an instrument for the removal of his private enemies; of being the friend of traitors and the enemy of men who were loyal to the true interests of the throne. He had brought in illiterates from his own family to occupy official posts. He had encouraged anonymous communications attacking his rivals; while those who queried his actions had a habit of disappearing. Furthermore, in flagrant disregard of the law forbidding the enlistment of eunuchs in the imperial bodyguards, Wei had got together a band of ruffians to guard his own person. Wei, the memorial continued, had utterly forgotten his position as a servant of the throne. When he travelled the country, the imperial banners and insignia went with him, and people prostrated themselves along his route. And there was much more to the same effect.

'Why,' Yang Lien pertinently asked the throne, 'should you nourish a tiger to work his evil will at your very elbows? Even if Wei's carcass,' he continued with prophetic insight, 'were hacked into mincemeat, his sins would remain unexpiated.'¹⁰ He concluded by asking that Wei should be examined by a commission of high officials, so that the laws of Heaven might be vindicated. 'Then,' he added, 'though your servant die, yet shall he live.'

Unfortunately for poor Yang Lien the memorial had little effect at the time. Between them the Chief Eunuch and Lady K'o persuaded their imperial protégé to pay no heed to the libellous document. A decree was issued establishing Wei Chung-hsien in his high position, and this was followed by another rebuking Yang for his impudence.

But the memorial had heartened others, who now took up the task of impeaching the Chief Eunuch. Another censor, Huang Tsun-su, sent in a memorial and this was swiftly fol-

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lowed by others from responsible officials. Wan Ching, a Board Secretary, made an unfavourable comparison between the tomb of the late emperor and the one Wei had prepared for himself. 'Sovereign power,' declared Wan Ching, 'cannot be delegated, and least of all to an emasculated minion. This Wei is practically become Emperor and the fountain of all honour; his friends secure well-feathered nests, whilst the bodies of his enemies are covered with boils and sores.'¹¹

This was too much. Wei, still sure of his position at court, had these outspoken memorialists imprisoned. Wan Ching was flogged and kicked to death; and it was hard to tell one corpse from the other when they were handed over to the relations for burial.

Outside the palace the people murmured among themselves. Inside, Precious Pearl struggled to draw Hsi Tsung away from his evil counsellors, and meditated on Buddhist truths in the Pavilion of Female Tranquillity.

She did not object to eating simply while Wei Chung-hsien and Lady K'o ate the choicest foods as if they, and not the young couple, were emperor and empress of China. She did not mind their plottings against her. She objected only to their influence over Hsi Tsung and the empire he nominally governed; and to this influence she opposed all her charm and powers of persuasion.

When Lady K'o gave the emperor aphrodisiacs¹² to stimulate his passions, Precious Pearl destroyed them. When the plotters tried to persuade the emperor that his consort's father was a criminal, Precious Pearl had only to look into the bloodshot royal eyes to dispel any such belief. But though Hsi Tsung would not give up this beautiful woman, he was never really free of the baleful influences which had surrounded him from birth. Only his death, not long to be delayed, was to separate him from these.

In 1623 Precious Pearl became pregnant. Wei Chung-hsien and his cronies were alarmed at the possibility of a child of

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hers succeeding to the throne. Even in the womb it would learn to hate the eunuchs; while, as mother of an emperor, Precious Pearl would have increased prestige. Wei and the Lady K'o struck quickly. They revealed to the weak-minded emperor that the trusted retinue of the empress was conspiring against his royal life. The fortunate ones were dismissed; the less fortunate executed. They were replaced by women whose loyalty to Wei and the Lady K'o was unquestioned. These women quickly proved their own loyalty, one of them massaging the empress so vigorously that her child was born dead.

There was still no heir when, four years later, the debilitated, spineless Hsi Tsung lay dying.

The rigorous Marxist historian who regards the economic factor as being of prime importance in elucidating historic change would, I think, be hard put to it to explain these palace revolutions in such terms. Time and again one is confronted with the overwhelming importance of the human factor in social change; a factor which is, so often, utterly unpredictable. And Wei Chung-hsien, as he watched the life of this anaemic puppet ebbing away, knew precisely the difference that the death of this one insignificant human being could make. It could sap his own power as certainly as an axe could bring down a tree. This debauched youngster had been like wax in his hands, but the next ruler might be different. Unless the next emperor were another puppet obedient to the strings!

If Lord Acton had been at a loss to name a man to illustrate his oft-quoted dictum that absolute power corrupted absolutely, he could have found no better example than the Chief Eunuch at this doubtful stage in his fortunes. He went to the Empress Precious Pearl, as if they had been on the best of terms, and suggested she should assume the chief regency on Hsi Tsung's death; her co-regent being a drunkard relative of his own, Wei Liang-ch'ing. But more was to come.

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He asked the empress to announce that she was again pregnant, so that, following the emperor's death, she could announce one of Wei Liang-ch'ing's sons as her own. Nepotism could hardly have gone further than this!

To the incredible request of this incomparable knave the orphan girl who had risen to become one of China's noblest empresses made a simple answer. 'For many years I have made me ready for death. If now I obey you, you will kill me sooner or later; if I refuse, you will kill me only a little sooner. But if I die resisting you to the utmost, I can face unashamed the souls of the departed emperors in the other world.'¹³

Yet this time virtue was to triumph. Precious Pearl acted so rapidly that for once Lady K'o and the Chief Eunuch were left standing. She persuaded the dying emperor to declare his brother his successor in the absence of an heir of his own. Chung Cheng, though reluctant to succeed at a time when all hell might be expected to break loose, was summoned to the bedside to receive a farewell message from his elder brother. It was typical of the man: 'Wei Chung-hsien fully deserves your trust and may be given the highest office with absolute confidence.'

After this final expression of wisdom, the soul of Hsi Tsung entered the Heavenly Guest-chamber in the Halls of his Illustrious Ancestors; his body was buried in the great graveyard of the Ming emperors outside Peking. Euphemism has been carried no further than it was by those who named his mausoleum the Tomb of Virtue!

Chung Cheng, with Precious Pearl to encourage him and watch over his safety during those first anxious days after he succeeded his brother, soon showed himself possessed of more sense than the late emperor. Support for him rallied; the scales tipped. The days of the wicked were numbered.

Of the plotters, it was Lady K'o who first went to join the ancestral spirits. Once she had been arrested, there was no

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end to those who sought to lodge accusations against her. She was condemned to suffer the *lingchih*, the most horrible and lingering of all deaths, which thriller writers have sometimes referred to as the death of a thousand cuts. The more merciful among us may hope for the Lady K'o's sake that she was able to make the customary payment to the executioner and so ensure that she was given the *coup de grâce* at the first blow!

Certainly it was an occasion for public rejoicing, and by all accounts very much of a Roman holiday. When the Lady K'o's quarters in the palace were searched no fewer than six pregnant imperial concubines were discovered—an indication, if not proof, that she planned to poison the emperor and substitute one of these infants for the heir to the throne.

With the penetrating searchlight of the investigators revealing his intrigues for what they were, and abandoned by his toadies, Wei knew that he was doomed to the same death as Lady K'o. Before Chung Cheng had been on the throne a couple of months, Wei the eunuch fled from the palace. But he knew that only death could end the hatred with which he was pursued. At Chufou in Shantung, not far from the grave of Confucius, he put a rope round his neck and hanged himself from a tree.

Even in death he was not allowed to rest in peace. His corpse was dismembered, and his severed head was hung over the main gate of the city of his birth.

Nor was he ever forgotten. His evil deeds have lived after him and made him immortal.



The Captive Concubines

WANG CH'IAN & HSIANG FEI

I SUPPOSE that, from before the days of recorded history, man the warrior has been in the habit of capturing such of the enemy's women as have pleased his fancy and of taking them home with him, along with his other booty, to show to his admiring friends. What the women themselves felt about such ravishment, we can only guess. Certainly in days when wife-capture by nomadic tribesmen was a commonplace, they had to endure far more shoving around than even the weakest and most abject of that sex could be expected to endure today. The suffragette movement occurred even later in China than it did in the West. For untold centuries it was not a good thing to be born a girl. No one rejoiced; and as Fu Hsuan, a poet of the third century A.D. reminds us, nothing on earth was held more cheap than a woman.

Perhaps it was the effect they had on men that enabled women to find the strength to endure the long ages of dispossession and their status as chattels. Attractive women discovered that, though legally and economically of no significance, they still had it in them to rule, even in non-matriarchal societies. They could affect the pulse-beats of the men who mattered in both eastern and western lands. Pascal, I think, was the first to suggest that, if Cleopatra's nose had been a little shorter, the history of the world would have been different. But the Chinese were aware of a similar truth in the very early years of their civilization.

Hollywood found the love triangle ready made. Long, long

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ago the beautiful wife of Menelaus was borne off to Troy by the enamoured Paris, and for ten weary years the Trojan War was waged about the skirts of Helena. Yet no doubt she found that more exciting than running the house while Menelaus went off doing heroic deeds with the boys!

It would be hard to censure a woman for preferring to be fought over to being neglected. The nunneries have been recruited from the ranks of neglected wives; and even in the harems of the Chinese emperors there have been neglected concubines pining for a glimpse of the Son of Heaven as they lay on their lonely beds.

'The wind blows and the dust.
Tomorrow he swears he will come.
His words are kind, but he breaks his trust.
My heart is numb.

All day the wind blew strong,
The sun was buried deep.
I have thought of him so long, so long,
I cannot sleep. . . .'¹

So wrote a poetess in the year 718 B.C. in the harem of the Prince of Wei, and a thousand other lonely ladies have echoed her words since then.

Taken from home at an early age, put under the domination of elderly women of the court who were only too mindful of the abuse and punishment that had been handed out to them in their own young days, liable to be strangled by the eunuchs for any severe lapses from the behaviour expected of her—such were the common experiences of an imperial concubine. The rare occasions when she was carried by the eunuchs to the emperor's couch did at least break the monotony of harem life.

For the girl whose home was far away or who was a prisoner

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in an alien culture, life at court was even harder. A Ruth 'in tears amid the alien corn' is just as poignant a figure to the Chinese mind as she is to our own; and there are few more moving stories than those of Hsiang Fei, the Fragrant Concubine of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, and the Lady Chao who set out bravely for the Jade Gate in the time of the Han dynasty.

We do not know a great deal about the Lady Chao.² Her name was Wang Ch'iang, and she was commonly known as Chao-chun, the Brilliant Lady. Sometimes Li Po and other poets wrote of her as Ming Fei, the Bright Concubine. But she was the most celebrated of those Chinese princesses who were sent to the Hun chieftains during Han times in an attempt to keep these border-raiding tribes on friendly terms with the empire. This white traffic in imperial ladies was repeated centuries later during the T'ang dynasty, when the Tibetans had replaced the Huns in liking Chinese delicacies.

Wang Ch'iang was born at Chingmen in modern Hopeh on the north bank of the Yangtse-kiang. She was the daughter of an educated Confucian official, who could conceive of no finer career for his daughter than that offered in the imperial harem at Ch'angan. She was a beautiful and virtuous maiden who might well have expected to become the emperor's favourite in time.

Unhappily, the Emperor Yuan, who had ascended the throne in 48 B.C., relied less on personal encounters to show him the charms of his myriad ladies than on the portraits the court artist, Mao Yen-shou, made of them. The emperor selected his personal attendants from the gallery of pin-ups which this indefatigable and rapacious artist had painted. And in this collection of pin-ups the most unpleasant face undoubtedly belonged to the lovely Wang Chao-chun.

There was, of course, a perfectly good reason for this. The ladies of the harem had been accustomed to bribe the artist to make them appear more attractive than they were. Those who paid the most could be sure of catching the royal eye

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when the Emperor Yuan next visited his portrait gallery to select a companion for his bed.

Wang Chao-chun, however, refused to pay the artist to enhance her charms. She knew she was by far the most attractive of all the concubines, and was quite content to let her beauty speak for itself.

She did not reckon on the spite of the furious painter. He painted her as the ugliest woman in the harem with a black mole under her right eye—a mark of such ill omen that disaster would almost certainly overtake any sovereign whose consort she became. So for seven years Chao-chun languished neglected among the other women, who probably lost few opportunities of enjoying her misfortune.

Thus, when in the year 33 B.C. the Shan-yu of the Huns came in person to the Chinese court to seek a wife from among the ladies there, the Emperor Yuan consulted his portrait gallery and picked Wang Chao-chun as the woman whose services could most readily be spared.

The sad but obedient lady prepared for the long journey to the rough barbaric land where she would be an exile; and when she was ready, she went, for the first time, into the presence of the Emperor Yuan to pay her respects before departure.

It was a sad day for Mao Yen-shou, when the emperor discovered how he had been duped by the rascally painter. Before him knelt the most beautiful woman he had ever seen—and she was about to leave China for ever. Vainly he tried to ransom her, offering a camel piled with gold in exchange for her.

The Hun chieftain stood firm; and the bargain had been made. Dressed in Tartar clothes and carrying a mandolin—for so the artists depict her—Chao-chun set out on the long journey across the desert to the home of her new lord. Perhaps on the journey she recalled the lament of an earlier Chinese exile who had passed along this route before her on the way to marry a nomadic king.

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'My people have married me
In a far corner of Earth;
Sent me away to a strange land,
To the king of the Wu-sun.
A tent is my house,
Of felt are my walls;
Raw flesh my food
With mare's milk to drink
Always thinking of my own country,
My heart sad within.
Would I were a yellow stork
And could fly to my old home.'³

There are conflicting stories about the Brilliant Lady's life with the Tartars, and it is clear that the Confucian moralisers have been at work here and there. We are told that she became accustomed to Tartar ways and quickly made herself an accomplished huntress; that she exerted a civilising influence on tribal behaviour and helped to maintain friendly relations between the Hsiung-nu and the Chinese.

In 31 B.C. her Tartar husband died. Chao-chun was then twenty-two and had borne him a son. In accordance with Hsiung-nu custom, the new Shan-yu—who was the son of the late Shan-yu's second wife—desired to take over his father's seraglio and to marry Chao-chun. One story says that the lovely Chao-chun took her own life rather than submit to the embraces of a man she had called 'son'; but another account relates that she conformed to the custom and bore her second husband two daughters, living happily with him until 20 B.C. when he died suddenly.

Chao-chun, according to this account, lived on until the year A.D. 18 when her son was murdered in a squabble over the succession. Broken-hearted she died, her thoughts turning in her last hours to the country of her birth. She asked to be buried as near to her homeland as possible.

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So they took her body in long marches back across the desert to Suiyuan. And there they laid her in a grave on the frontier of China.

'Full in her face the desert sand; full in her hair, the wind.
Her pencilled brows have lost their black, the rouge has
melted from her cheeks.

Grief and pain and bitter toil have left so deep a mark
That now is the end she is very like what the painter made
her in his picture.'⁴

Thus in those wild nomadic steppe lands of Central Asia the exiled concubine was laid to rest. They say the grass over her grave is perpetually green.

*

The grave of Hsiang Fei, the Fragrant Concubine, lies well inside the Chinese frontier. In his book *Jehol, City of Emperors*, Sven Hedin includes a photograph of the simple stone situated at the head of a grave near the mausoleum of the Manchu Emperor Ch'ien Lung in the Valley of the Eastern Tombs, seventy miles from Peking. I remember too when I was in Peking having a little hill, just inside the southern wall of the city, pointed out to me as the site of the grave where the body of Hsiang Fei was first interred after her death.

Hers was also an exile's grave; the grave of a woman who, unlike so many others, wanted no affection from the Son of Heaven and desired only to be left alone with her sorrow.

Hsiang Fei was a prisoner of war—the captured consort of Khozi Khan, one of the two rulers of Eastern Turkestan'. This great Mohammedan country of Central Asia lay between the mighty snow ranges of the T'ien Shan and the K'un Lung. Its two rulers were brothers who resented the necessity of paying tribute to China. In 1756 they declared their independence.

But the China of Ch'ien Lung was not to be so easily flouted. An expedition led by the distinguished General Chao Hui marched into the steppe lands we know today as Sinkiang. For

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three years the fighting continued. Then in 1759 Kashgar and Yarkand fell, and the two brothers fled across the borders into modern Afghanistan. With the younger rode his beautiful wife, who seems to have been something of a Jeanne d'Arc, riding from camp to camp on horseback and encouraging the men by her presence.

The brothers' hope of asylum was vain. The sultan of the province did not want to make enemies of the powerful Chinese. He had their heads lopped off and forwarded to Chao Hui with his compliments. As for the beautiful warrior princess—at this time about eighteen years old—she had for long been known to him by repute, and would be a conquest of which any man, however exalted, might be proud.

Unfortunately for the sultan, the widowed princess had other ideas. She wanted nothing to do with her husband's murderer, and would kill herself if he dared lay a finger on her.

The fame of the lovely woman whose skin exuded a fragrance that was said to be unique in all the world had not only reached the ears of the disappointed sultan. She was whispered of in the court of Ch'ien Lung, and the emperor had given Chao Hui orders to bring her back with him to Peking if this was at all possible.

Chao Hui traced her flight over the frontier and demanded her surrender. The sultan realised it would be impolitic to refuse. He asked a high price—ten pairs of white jade rings; and when the Chinese general paid, he handed the captive princess to the servant of her new master, perhaps hoping that he would be as unsuccessful as he himself had been in winning her favours.

The journey back to Peking over the Silk Road which Marco Polo had once travelled took six long months. In the midst of the victorious army the princess travelled like a queen. 'In order that the long journey from Aksu to Peking should not tire her, the wheels of her carriage were wrapped

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in strips of felt, and the windows hung with brocade. The carriage was so large that she could lie down in it. In addition to her two favourite ladies, she had twenty slave girls and as many servants, and she always had her own guard of soldiers. As she was accustomed to a daily bath of sheep's milk and koumis, it was arranged that these luxuries should be provided on the journey. After her bath her women rubbed her with perfume and she rinsed her mouth with scented tea. In this way she kept her skin soft and white, and an intoxicating perfume followed her wherever she went. Not only men, but women, were bewitched by her beauty and charm.'⁵

In such a manner did the Mohammedan princess reach Peking and the apartments of the emperor in the Old Summer Palace. Proud, haughty like the generations of her Turkish ancestors, she would not kowtow before the Son of Heaven whose armies had conquered her country. Nor did she greet or look at the man who, for a smile from her, would have laid the treasures of his mighty empire at her feet.

The months that followed saw little change in her attitude, if we are to believe the tales and romances which have been woven about Ch'ien Lung and his unrequited love. The emperor gave her costly presents and showed her every kindness. He seemed to have great sympathy for her lonely exile and did everything possible, apart from sending her back to her homeland, to make her feel at home.

A miniature Mohammedan city known as the Moslem Encampment, with houses and shops like those she had known as a girl, was erected for her within the palace grounds, and artists painted numerous Turkestan scenes to remind her of the past. South of the Forbidden City a mosque was built and every day a holy man called the faithful to prayer. This mosque remained standing for 150 years before it was pulled down in 1912 by the orders of Yuan Shih-kai. Yet still to be seen in Peking is the two-storied pavilion on the South Lake where the exiled princess, who was sometimes called the Stranger



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Concubine, lived for a while. Its name was nearly as beautiful as its occupant: the Pavilion of Thoughts of Home.

During her months in Peking all Hsiang Fei's thoughts were thoughts of home. Kindness and presents did not make the Son of Heaven any more acceptable to her. It was even whispered that she had sworn to avenge on him the murder of her husband—with one of those little jewelled daggers with which she was always toying.

On one occasion at least the emperor was given a shock. Slightly the worse for drink he came into her apartment, and overwhelmed with her loveliness began to fondle her. There was a flash of steel and the knife caught his arm, the blood staining the imperial robes. After that incident, there were guards about to see it did not happen again.

There were other times when Hsiang Fei was a more amenable captive, when she was heard laughing with the ladies in her apartments, and when she performed a sword dance with such speed and dexterity that the emperor and his retinue could only marvel at her.

It is a pity there was no camera to portray this proud princess as she danced with the bright sword blades flashing in her hands. The portrait of her dressed in seventeenth century armour which was painted by the Jesuit artist Castiglione is the best known picture of her. There is nothing timorous or weak about the face in that picture; she is an exile who had put a bold face on her sorrow.

One imagines that Hsiang Fei's attitude must have softened somewhat under the kindness Ch'ien Lung showed her, and that she must have smiled a little wistfully at him when he came pleadingly, more like a beggar than the emperor of China, to her apartments. Some stories suggest that she was his companion on various excursions around Peking, when the emperor ignored the other women of his court and was in constant attendance on his exiled princess.

How far she yielded to the importunities of the infatuated

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emperor we cannot know. We do know that day after day he courted her, fêted her, desired her. Ch'ien Lung went off his food, and failed to summon up any interest in affairs of state. His mother, the Empress Dowager, and the Empress Fu Chai, Ch'ien Lung's wife, watched with mounting anxiety the love-sick Son of Heaven.

The stories at any rate agree that it was these two ladies who brought Ch'ien Lung's ill-starred romance to its tragic end. They saw that unless Hsiang Fei could be removed from Peking the same misfortunes might fall on the reign of Ch'ien Lung as had fallen on other reigns where the emperors had come under the power of a favourite concubine. He had refused to send Hsiang Fei away from the court; and in spite of their remonstrances he would not cease hanging around her apartments in spite of the rumours that she had even dared to threaten his life. Since Ch'ien Lung would do nothing in the matter, they—the watchful empresses—would have to take action themselves.

The moment to strike was carefully chosen. With the advent of the winter solstice, the imperial duty lay on the white marble slabs of the Altar of Heaven, where sacrifices had to be offered by the emperor to the only power in the universe greater than his own. This duty would require the presence of the emperor of the Celestial Kingdom for four days. During the ritual period of purification before the final sacrifice, the Emperor Ch'ien Lung would reside outside the palace and have no contact with his women. This then was the moment to put Hsiang Fei beyond his reach for ever.

As soon as Ch'ien Lung had departed to perform the annual ritual, the Empress Dowager his mother, to whom even the emperor had to render filial submission, sent an attendant to summon Hsiang Fei.

When the Mohammedan girl stood tall and proud before the thrones of the two empresses, they must have realised why it was that the emperor had been bewitched ever since her

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arrival in Peking. Her fragrance filled the room, clinging to the rich draperies. Her beauty made the loveliest of her retinue look plain.

Ch'ien Lung's mother wasted no time. She accused the girl of using charms to bewitch her son; of diverting his mind from his proper duties. She was endangering his Majesty's health; and it was reported that she had presumed to threaten his life.

Hsiang Fei answered bluntly. The emperor was bewitching himself. There was no point in her using charms when she did not love him and had no desire for his company. Why should she love a man whose soldiers had been responsible for the death of her husband? Her only desire was to return to her native land and her own people. She was in Peking as a captive, nothing more; and death itself would be more welcome than this perpetual exile.

Death and nothing less had been in the minds of the two jealous women who had made themselves her judges. They did not know which they hated most, her beauty or her contemptuous dismissal of the absent Ch'ien Lung from her heart. But she had expressed her willingness to die. There was no need to say any more.

The eunuchs escorted the Fragrant Concubine to a small room in the palace; and when Ch'ien Lung returned from making the ritual sacrifices to Heaven, he found her dead body there with the strangling cord still tight about her neck.

The unforgettable perfume lingered on in the chamber of death.

I3



The Emperor and the Monk

FU-LIN

IN the year 1661, the funeral cortège of the first Manchu emperor of China made its slow way out of the ancient walled city of Peking on its way to the Valley of the Eastern Tombs. In the ornate coffin lay the body of the twenty-three year old monarch, wasted by consumption and marked with the scars of smallpox, who, according to some, had died of a broken heart.

At least that is one story—and most likely, one must admit, the true one. But there is perhaps more than a possibility that the life of Fu-lin did not end quite so early or so decisively as the historians make out; and that the body in the coffin was not his at all.

It is possible that the emperor who had dreamed of retiring from the world to the seclusion of a monastery did indeed become a monk and live out his life among the hills. It is possible: in such matters it would be rash to say more.

We must start with what we know. Fu-lin was a grandson of Nurhachi, the first of the great Manchus. He was born in March 1638—the ninth son of the Manchu Emperor Abahai. His mother, though a Mongol princess, was only a secondary consort, and there seemed little chance of the son she nursed ever succeeding to the Dragon throne of China where the last of the Mings held sway over a tottering dynasty.

Yet after Abahai's sudden death in September 1643, a council of state held in Mukden resolved to pass over the deceased's eldest son and settle the succession on the five year old Fu-lin.

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He was already a popular child, strong and well-built for his age. Fu-lin had shown remarkable promise—on the hunting field at any rate. At least one deer had fallen to his bow and arrow on hunting expeditions.

In October 1644 the young Fu-lin, now six years of age, was installed in the wake of the conquering Manchu armies as the first Ta Ch'ing emperor to sit on the Chinese throne. At the same time, the Manchu capital was transferred from Mukden to Peking; and the reign of the new monarch was given the title of Shun-chih, meaning Heaven-obedient Government.

That was how it began. And though it is hard to believe that the Manchu invaders, who forced the Chinese to shave the front of their heads and plait their hair into a pigtail in accordance with Manchu custom, were universally popular, the long-suffering Chinese endured them as patiently as they had suffered other governments before them. In court circles, the young emperor and his uncle Prince Jui, who was appointed regent, appear to have been well-liked. The Jesuit Father Martini described Fu-lin's enthronement in these words: 'This child mounting the throne where his ancestors formerly appeared with much renown, behaved during this act with a majesty which did not at all resemble a child's and made a speech to his uncles and to other officers of the army in which he showed a force of admirable spirit.'¹

As the young emperor grew up, he continued to win the hearts and affections of those about him. Father Adam Schall, who had enjoyed a great reputation in Peking since he began living there in 1622, was one of the emperor's tutors and continued to influence him in many ways.

The hunting prince soon showed himself as at home with his books as on a horse. When he first came to Peking he had to start by learning the Chinese language. Then, not content with his rapidly acquired proficiency in that difficult tongue, he started to familiarise himself with the treasures of Chinese

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literature and in particular with the teachings of the sages. In his short reign he was even able to find time to write many commentaries on Taoist and Confucian texts. The people waited for this talented young ruler to take over the reins of government.

Nor did they have to wait long. In 1651 Prince Jui died; though before he did so he had arranged for the marriage of his thirteen year old imperial ward to a Mongol girl of royal blood. Thus, in that same year, Fu-lin both married and assumed control of the government as the people at court had long wished.

But already religious rather than political matters were becoming Fu-lin's chief concern. His mother's influence—which persisted even through part of the following reign—and the Buddhist lamas who, during the whole of his short life, had been familiar and persuasive figures in the Manchu capital appear to have been working steadily on the mind and imagination of the youth who was now the emperor of All Under Heaven. In 1652 the religious impulses in Fu-lin's life were to receive a new impetus.

One of the landmarks of modern Peking, towering, a great white ornament, from its island base in the North Lake, is the White Dagoba. This elaborate Tibetan stupa commemorates the visit made by the Dalai Lama to Peking in 1652, following on letters of invitation from the Chinese government.² Another building of the same era used to stand in the northern sector of Peking. Nowadays we can see only the ruins of that red-painted enclosure which was mentioned by a member of a Russian embassy which arrived in Peking in 1655. It was erected 'when the Dalai Lama came to them from Borontala, whom they call a god, against his arrival'.³ Foreigners and the guide-books to Peking call it the Yellow Temple.

Yet dagoba and temple were by no means the only changes that took place in Peking in these middle years of the seventeenth century. The visit of the All-embracing Lama, engin-

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eered as it most certainly was for political reasons, must have had the kind of effect—at least on Mongol and Manchu believers—that a Papal visit would have had on a superstitious countryside in medieval Europe.

The impressionable Fu-lin, brought up by lamas, must have felt as humble in the Great Lama's presence as any of the court officials did in his own. His last desires to be a warrior like his father may well have vanished as he asked eager questions and humbly sought advice from this holy guest who held sway over the minds of uncounted millions. If we place any credence at all in the story of Fu-lin's abdication, it is probably from this year 1652 that we should date his resolve to exchange the empire for a hermit's cell.

Certainly, from this time onwards Fu-lin showed less and less interest in government. Some, indeed, said that Father Schall virtually acted as Prime Minister and played an important part in negotiations with trade representatives from Europe who now began to arrive at the Chinese court in ever increasing numbers. The Jesuit and the Emperor Fu-lin were the best of friends despite their religious differences. Fu-lin used to pay so many informal visits to the priest's house that it became embarrassing. For it was a convention that a chair used by an emperor should be covered with yellow silk and never sat on again by any lesser mortal. Fu-lin came so often and sat down so casually that Schall had to protest. 'I shall soon have nowhere to sit in my own home,' he said.

If anyone could have converted Fu-lin to the Christian faith, it must surely have been this gentle and learned German, Adam Schall. We are told how the emperor 'listened with patience and interest to the story of Christ, and wept at the recital of the tragedy of Gethsemane and Calvary'.⁴ But he could not assent to this faith which the Nestorians had first brought to T'ang China a thousand years before. His own attempts to convert the eunuchs and his beautiful concubine to Buddhism met with more success than the Jesuit's.

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The Lady Tung, the daughter of a Manchu official in the imperial household, was, say the records, as good as she was beautiful. In 1656, the year she entered the palace at the age of eighteen, Emperor Fu-lin promoted her to be a consort of the first rank, and not long afterwards persuaded her to embrace the Buddhist faith. The happiness of this young religiously-minded couple was as intense as it was short-lived. In the autumn of 1660 Tung Kuei-fei died.

The sorrowing Fu-lin did not long survive her. At the age of twenty-three, in the spring of the following year, Fu-lin, the first of China's Manchu rulers, entered the Nirvana of his faith.

Such are the bare bones of what we may call the orthodox account of the life and death of Fu-lin the saintly Buddhist emperor. Yet strange stories of his abdication from the throne and his withdrawal from the world persisted; stories which were given new life when the first writers of the Chinese Revolutionary period sought subjects for their tales in the endless diaries and memoirs which purported to lay bare the intrigues and secret lives of the now hated Manchus.

It was suggested for instance⁵ that the famous seventeenth century Chinese novel the *Hung Lou Meng*, which we know as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, might be nothing more than a thinly disguised version of what had gone on in the Manchu court. Was it not possible that Fu-lin had secretly abdicated, arranged a mock funeral, and then gone off to the monastery his heart was set on? Did the strange events of the novel find an echo in the life story of this very emperor?

It was a fascinating possibility, and certainly one that had to be considered. That is what R. F. Johnstone set out to do in a couple of articles in *The New China Review* in 1920. In these he reviews the evidence and points out various inconsistencies in the accounts of what is said to have happened. He concludes his examination with a clear statement of his own position. 'I believe,' he writes, 'the emperor died of a wasting disease

early in 1661 at the age of twenty-three, and that the end was hastened, though certainly not caused, by the death of the lady Tung Kuei-fei.'⁶

Yet to point out the snags in the tales about the emperor-monk, to show the financial interest the monks clearly had in perpetuating such stories, to prove that the accounts cannot be swallowed hook, line and sinker by those who are ready to believe—all this is not to establish certainty. There remains a possibility that the legends really were embroidered, inconsistent and faulty versions of the truth.

It is possible that the emperor who found the burdens of state wearisome did assume a monk's dress and relinquish for ever his bright yellow court robes that were so richly embroidered with dragons and the twelve ancient emblems. We cannot *a priori* dismiss the romantic and the fanciful merely because there is usually a simpler explanation.

There was, after all, a precedent for imperial behaviour of this kind. In the sixth century the devout Buddhist Emperor Liang Wu Ti left his palace on three separate occasions to devote himself to the worship of Buddha in the Cock Crow Monastery, and the last time he did not return to the throne. Fu-lin probably knew all about this predecessor who, like himself, was the intimate companion of monks.

In the Ch'ing dynasty biographies⁷ we learn of the influence of other Buddhists on the Emperor Fu-lin after the Lama of Lamas had returned to the spinning prayer-wheels and the tattered prayer-flags of his own Tibetan capital. One of these was a priest named Hsing Ts'ung whom Fu-lin met on a hunting trip in 1657. The emperor was so charmed by this man that he invited him to stay at the court and talk with him regularly about the Buddhist mysteries. 'Led to believe,' writes the biographer, 'that in a previous incarnation he had himself been a Buddhist monk, Fu-lin became a devout believer in Ch'an Buddhism.' Hsing Ts'ung introduced several abbots to the emperor; one of these being T'ung-hsiu, abbot of a mon-

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astery in Chekiang. Of this holy man the Emperor Fu-lin professed himself a disciple.

After the death of beautiful Tung Kuei-fei who was only a year younger than himself, the sorrowing Fu-lin had his hair tonsured with the idea of becoming a monk. That is admitted by the biographer. But he goes on to add that Abbot T'ung-hsiu used his great influence over his disciple to prevent the emperor from taking so drastic a step.

It was soon after this that Fu-lin died or disappeared; and the child who was to be known as the mighty K'ang Hsi ascended the vacant throne.

Now if Fu-lin disappeared and left Peking by the gate that is still known as the Shun-chih Men, whither did he go? To a monastery seems likely enough, knowing as we do his monastic desires. Nowhere else could he have been better concealed from the world. In any case, few outside the palace courtiers would have recognized the emperor without his imperial regalia. There were no news-reels and picture papers with all-colour supplements in those days; and we know that it was forbidden for the man in the street to gaze into the face of the Son of Heaven. Spathary, the learned Russian envoy who visited Peking in this century, tells us that when the emperor 'issues from his palace, everyone runs away out of the street, and guards are there to see that no one should look at him'.⁸

The legend of Fu-lin's abdication would certainly be strengthened if one temple only admitted receiving him within its walls. But there are two main claimants to the honour.

First is T'ien T'ai Ssu, the Temple of the Heavenly Terrace in the Western Hills near the capital, and this is the place mentioned by Backhouse and Bland in their account of the story.⁹ In this temple is to be found a carefully preserved life-size image of a monk, which is at least two to three centuries old. It is suggested that the image is in fact a mummified body. That is not in itself so remarkable, since at one time it was

fairly common for the bodies of celebrated dead monks to be transformed into images and set up before the worshippers in Chinese temples. But it is rumoured that the mummy of T'ien T'ai Ssu is of an early abbot—an abbot who did not kneel when the Emperor K'ang Hsi once visited the temple; an abbot who had himself sat on the throne of China.

It is unfortunate that the sceptical Mr Johnstone should have satisfied himself that the image is actually the mummified body of a celebrated madman known as the Demon King Monk who died here in 1710. Doubtless, however, the legend will persist that the body is Fu-lin's; and in these matters, as I have suggested, certainty is always just around the corner.

Others believe that it was to Wu T'ai Shan, China's most sacred mountain, that Fu-lin went after leaving the Forbidden City.

In the 1660s the abbot of the famous monastery here was an old man of eighty, and it fell to his lot to supervise the mourning rituals which had to be carried out following on the notice of Fu-lin's death. These were still in progress when a young man was announced at the door. 'I have come from Peking,' the stranger told the abbot, 'especially to pay my respects to you.'

Impressed by the striking appearance of the visitor, the abbot invited him in and tried to persuade him to reveal more of his background. The other was reticent. He had come, he said, to be a monk and to subject himself to the rules of the order. He did not want to discuss the past, but to forget it. Yet in conversation he is said to have let slip a phrase that confirmed the suspicions of the shrewd old abbot. 'I have thrown away an empire,' the stranger said, 'like a worn-out sandal.'

The stranger was proficient in knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures, and there was no reason why he should not be accepted into the order. He was ordained a monk and given the religious name of Hui-chen, meaning Wisdom and Truth.

Yet from the start Hui-chen was different from the other

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monks, who grew jealous of his austere, utterly-in-earnest way of living. He seldom conversed with them, and for long periods lived alone, high up on the mountain, in a remote hermitage. The old abbot reproved the jealousy of the monks, telling them that one day a great person would come to Wu T'ai Shan to seek out the mysterious Hui-chen.

According to the monastic records, the first visit K'ang Hsi paid to the mountain was in the year 1683, though the account taken from a book of secret journeys made by the Emperor K'ang Hsi is not so precise. But the day came when the monks knelt in rows in the great hall of the monastery to welcome and render obeisance to Heaven's earthly representative.

The emperor inspected the kneeling figures. 'Is everyone here?' he asked the abbot. 'All except the monk Hui-chen, your Majesty. He is never seen by pilgrims, but lives alone among the clouds.'

'I have come to see him,' said the emperor. 'If someone will show me the way, I will go to his retreat.' With a young novice to guide him, K'ang Hsi set off up the steep mountain path.

At Hui-chen's retreat K'ang Hsi stood unnoticed in the doorway for a long time. He looked closely at the tonsured coarse-robed hermit he believed to be his father. Then he fell on his knees before him. 'My imperial father! Your son and servant has been profoundly unhappy in that not till now has he been able to render filial devotion to your majesty.'

Hui-chen looked up and said he did not understand; but as K'ang Hsi went on traces of emotion showed on his face. 'Your son and servant knows himself to be unworthy of your majesty's solicitude; but does not the memory of the empress-dowager and the empress touch your majesty's heart?' But Hui-chen still refused to talk about the world he had left behind for ever; and soon afterwards K'ang Hsi bowed humbly before the hermit and descended the mountain.

When he got back to Peking, a handsome donation was sent

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to the monastery from the imperial treasury, and during the balance of his reign over a million taels found their way to the monastic coffers.

K'ang Hsi himself is reported to have made other visits, and never did the emperor fail to visit the retreat of the strange monk who had been given the name Hui-chen.

These then are two of the stories told of Fu-lin's disappearance from the world. We pay our money and we take our choice; or we may reject them both and stick to the unadorned straightforward account that says he died in 1661 and was later buried in the Eastern Tombs. But whatever theory we embrace, we shall be wise to follow the Cromwellian advice, and consider it possible that we may be mistaken.

14



The Buddha of the Great Within

TZU HSI

IT is not only into the life-stories of people who lived centuries ago that legends and conflicting rumours have crept. The distant past and China's yesterday were alike subject to the tongues of gossips and writers of memoirs who had an axe to grind.¹ And the intrigues that went on within the secluded courtyards of the Forbidden City in the last decades of the nineteenth century are never likely to be placed entirely beyond conjecture.

In that Great Within, lapped by the waters of its moat and shut off from the world outside by high brick walls, eunuchs, courtiers and courtesans modelled their behaviour on the patterns of antiquity. The plots and counter-plots; the cruelty and the elegance; the pleasures and perversions of dissolute men and women—these were echoes of what had gone on long before in the pleasure gardens of Yang Ti, in the harems of the eunuch-ridden Mings.

And yet it was only yesterday. After the war when I was in Peking, the Old Buddha (Lao Fo-yeh) did not seem so far away in time. Her portrait hung in the Palace of Complete Happiness in the Forbidden City and on the wall of the Palace of Peaceful Old Age. Her collection of clocks—one of her more harmless amusements—her silks, her brocades, her furniture filled pavilion after pavilion. There was even a stuffed parrot which had once watched and listened to the woman who ruled an empire, and who liked to hear herself compared with Queen Victoria. I wondered if this bird had

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ever given away any court secrets. A ninth century poet once warned the court ladies about gossiping in the neighbourhood of a parrot's cage!

In the New Summer Palace outside Peking I saw the little wooden paddle-boat in which she used to go on excursions on the lake, and all the beautiful buildings and *objets d'art* with which she surrounded herself. Peking was full of the presence of China's last great empress. The beauty of the surviving relics almost made one forget the kind of woman Tzu Hsi was, and the way she acquired and maintained her despotic power as the last of the great Manchus.

Yehonala was born in 1835, in one of those dusty lanes to the east of Peking's Forbidden City. Her father was an unsuccessful official named Huei Cheng who never reached high rank; but his clan was rich and powerful, claiming to trace its descent back to the wife of Nurhachi—the man who founded Manchu rule in China and was the first direct ancestor of the Ta Ch'ing Emperors. Huei Cheng, who died when his daughter was three years old, could have had no inkling that he was the father of a girl who was to become Grand Empress-Dowager of China and the last great ruler of the empire Ch'in Shih Huang-ti had founded.

We know that the young Yehonala grew into an accomplished maiden, able to paint and make verses, familiar both with the Classics and the historical records of the Twenty-four Dynasties. These accomplishments, however, were shared by quite a few aristocratic ladies. It was in 1852 that she took her first step to power. In that year a decree was issued commanding the attendance of beautiful young Manchu girls at the Imperial Household Office; from them a number of maidens would be selected to bring the harem of the young Emperor Hsien Feng up to full strength. Yehonala was one of the many candidates for the royal favours.

At this time, the woman who in later years was remarkable for her ogre-like qualities and whose face resembled nothing

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so much as a yellow, withered apple was, we are told, a tall slim beauty; certainly she was attractive enough to be chosen as one of the twenty-eight girls who were added to the population of the Great Within. Nobody guessed that Yehonala was to dominate it for half a century.

For centuries it was the dream of most attractive young girls that they might rise to become an imperial concubine; to be like those celebrated beauties of the past from Pao Ssu and Hsi Shih to the fascinating Yang Kuei-fei. Few of the dreamers ever achieved the power wielded by such concubines as these; but they all hoped to be stars in their own right, and a girl who could get as far as the women's pavilions of the Great Within felt that she was well on the way to stardom.

So Yehonala—for that was the maiden's name—tried, just as keenly as any pretty shop-girl in a Los Angeles drug-store, to attract the attention of the man who could make her a star. His reputation as one of the most depraved, dissolute and contemptible monarchs in all Chinese history did not matter to Yehonala. Hsien Feng was the Dragon Emperor: his bed—if she could beat the other girls to it—could be the magic stairway to power.

How she accomplished her end is her secret. She is said to have been witty and to have talked well. She could sing and mimic people about the palace. In 1854 she had her first rise in concubine status; and in 1856 she bore Hsien Feng a son, T'ung Chih.

At least, she said he was her son. It was rumoured later that she had purchased the child from outside the palace to give the emperor the heir he craved.

It may be so. Who will ever know the full story of what went on within those high palace walls? That T'ung Chih was later to spend as much time with the Peking prostitutes as Hsien Feng had done, and was to appear every bit as depraved is not definite evidence for foisting his paternity on Hsien

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Feng. While heredity always counts, environment almost certainly counts for more; and, and as we have had occasion to see before, the imperial pavilions were more often than not places where vice was inculcated in heirs to the throne, so that their young minds might be occupied otherwise than by problems of government administration. The court of imperial China resembled Rome in the days of the Empire, where young emperors indulged every kind of abnormal lust and found no vice too extravagant for their tasting.

Perhaps, in this matter of his son, we should give the Emperor Hsien Feng the benefit of the doubt. In any case, the father of T'ung Chih had no reason to be a proud man!

With her rise to the rank of an imperial concubine, Yehonala became a different woman. She no longer bothered to hide her arrogance and ambition. She had no desire to retain the favours of her royal master so long as she could keep her influence over him. The imperial clansman, Su Shun, who a few years later was decapitated to the delight of the Peking crowds, found in Yehonala at this time an ally in his chosen task of keeping the lecherous emperor unsteady on his feet and his mind steady on the delights of debauchery. 'Often after a night of prolonged orgies, his legs tottered under him at the hour of audience and on one occasion he was unable properly to perform the sacrificial rites at the Temple of Heaven.'² Hsien Feng was far from being one of the Sage Rulers.

Yehonala selected women for his harem from the city brothels, ringing the changes whenever she suspected the emperor was becoming too enamoured of these girls whose Chinese names seem to have been so much more attractive than their characters. Four of the most alluring were known as the Four Springtimes.

With so much that was charming to occupy his attention, Hsien Feng was pleased enough to let Yehonala ferret through court papers and issue orders in his name. It was during these

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years that Yehonala prepared herself for the life of plotting and intrigue that stretched ahead of her to the brink of the grave itself. She surrounded herself with a chosen retinue of women and eunuchs who acted as her spies and depended on her for rewards and punishments. When she was given the title Tzu Hsi, Western Empress—because she occupied a palace on the west side of the Forbidden City—she became known to China as the second woman in the empire. Yet already she was the most potent force behind the Dragon Throne.

The first lady was, of course, the childless wife of Hsien Feng, who bore the title Tzu An or Eastern Empress. She was a mild pleasant woman who was content enough to let the energetic Tzu Hsi take control. She imagined that what went on in the palace did not concern her. How wrong she was may have occurred to her years later when she swallowed the poison Tzu Hsi so smilingly prepared.

It is easy enough, when you are watching the machinations taking place inside the Great Within, to forget that there is always the Great Without—the vast countryside of China with its farms and villages, its cities and the ant-heap life of its people, whose endless labours kept alive the parasites and sycophants, the courtiers and schemers, who buzzed about the pavilions of the Forbidden City and of the Summer Palace beyond the city walls.

The Great Within and the Great Without were two worlds, separated by a wall which rumour alone scaled easily.

After the Revolution of 1911, the people from the Great Without could walk on the walls and look down over the huddle of roofs that sweep so gracefully above the courtyards of the Forbidden City. But such peeping was not allowed while the empire lasted. The first Catholic church built west of the Chung Hai was torn down in the last quarter of the nineteenth century on orders from Tzu Hsi. Why? Its steeple overlooked the walls of the Great Within!

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While Tzu Hsi intrigued with the eunuchs and the emperor toyed with the Four Springtimes and their successors, a new conflict with the western world broke out on the borders of the empire in Canton. It was the affair of the little Chinese-owned but Hong Kong-registered ship, *Arrow*, which sailed under the British flag, and whose crew was carried off by the hot-tempered Cantonese viceroy in October 1856.

This is not the place to attempt a summary of Sino-Western relations at this time. Like all diplomatic skirmishes, they were not the black and white affairs they were made out to be. How much the court of Hsien Feng was acquainted with what was happening at the other end of China is a matter for speculation. But its sympathies were anti-foreign, and there was probably little doubt in any of the courtiers' minds that if ever the aggressive foreigners came near Peking the imperial troops would have no difficulty in sending them about their business.

As everyone knows, it turned out very differently. The *Arrow* affair had repercussions which continued until 1860. The Emperor Hsien Feng's despatches to the enemy—whether they were drafted by the martial-minded Tzu Hsi or not—made plain the resolution of the Son of Heaven to drive the British and French invaders—'these pestilential savages' as they were called—back into the sea. But when the invaders approached Peking, Hsien Feng decided it was time to depart on a tour of inspection of the empire, though he left strict orders behind him that the foreign troops should be destroyed during his absence.

For the last time, in the autumn of 1860, he left the lovely Garden of Perfect Brightness,³ twelve miles outside the capital, which K'ang Hsi, the second emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty, had founded a century and a half before. Its treasures were looted, and its buildings burned behind him—an act of vandalism which our historians no longer seek to excuse.

It is related that when Hsien Feng lay dying he asked for

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information about the British species of 'foreign devil'. One of his courtiers told all he knew, and the emperor murmured sadly, 'They always seem to be going to war with somebody!'

And now the first regency of Tzu Hsi was at hand. In August 1861 Hsien Feng died in Jehol and was succeeded by his only son, the infant T'ung Chih. But what mattered was the regency. Who should pull the strings?

No one had fawned on the dying emperor more assiduously than Tsai Yuan and the imperial clansman Su Shun, who had been master of ceremonies at so many imperial orgies. They tried to poison his mind against Tzu Hsi, and get two cronies of royal blood appointed regents. But the great seal of authority they did not get. Tzu Hsi had it; and she was shrewd enough to know that it was worth more than the last whispers of a dying man.

The Imperial Jade Seal was made under the orders of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti. It was a rare and beautiful stone, and the characters inscribed on it said: 'By command of Heaven to reign for ever.' Neither Shih Huang-ti nor his successors discovered the elixir which would have enabled them to live for ever; but the seal became a symbol that its possessor had the mandate of Heaven to rule over the Chinese people, whether they liked it nor not.⁴

Armed with this treasured possession, Tzu Hsi set off back to Peking with her son, the Emperor T'ung Chih, and the Dowager Empress Tzu An—of whom the boy was fonder than he was of his own mother. It is said that Su Shun and his friends tried to get her assassinated en route, and might have succeeded had not the handsome officer Jung Lu—who was reported to be one of Tzu Hsi's lovers—intervened.

Instead of Su Shun, it was Tzu Hsi who issued decrees in the name of the emperor and her co-regent Tzu An. She ordered the execution of the would-be regents and Su Shun and confiscated their enormous fortunes for her own use. Yehonala, in her own eyes at least, had made good.

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This first regency—known by four Chinese characters which may be delightfully translated as *Listening from Behind Screens to Reports on Government Affairs*—lasted from 1861 to 1873, the year in which T'ung Chih reached his majority.

It seems unlikely that this drunken brawler and haunter of brothels would have lasted much longer than Hsien Feng even if his continued existence had been regarded as a boon by those who knew him best. Tzu Hsi would certainly never have let him take over the full authority to which he was entitled. As she previously had encouraged Hsien Feng to enjoy other women, so now 'she encouraged, or took no steps to restrain, the vicious tendencies which were matters of notoriety in Peking, and which eventually led to his death from a disease contracted in the low haunts of the Chinese city'.⁵ Night after night, when T'ung Chih slunk through the hole he had made in the palace wall to sport with his friends, ravish his women and purchase lewd paintings for the walls of his room, Tzu Hsi—metaphorically at least—wished him well.

By 1872 it was thought desirable that this gay eligible young emperor should take to himself a more permanent partner in the shape of a wife. The possible choices were eventually whittled down to two, the co-regents Tzu Hsi and Tzu An each favouring a different girl. Allowed to choose for himself, T'ung Chih chose A Lu-te, which displeased Tzu Hsi intensely since she had desired a girl called Feng to be the empress.

Had the young emperor possessed resolution and character and a body capable of keeping these qualities alive, Tzu Hsi's power might have ended for good there and then; for both T'ung Chih and A Lu-te disliked her. But this is a big *if*. It is difficult not to believe that Tzu Hsi and the eunuch Li Lien-ying would, even without exerting themselves unduly, have always been more than a match for this pair of youngsters.

When we know what happened there is little point in speculation. It was a short marriage. T'ung Chih contracted

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smallpox on one of his outings and lay fatally ill. A Lu-te was rumoured to be *enceinte*, but at the moment there was no heir.

Tzu Hsi acted swiftly. She proposed to a council of ministers that the infant son of her sister, the Princess Ch'un, should succeed to the throne. There is a story that T'ung Chih had different ideas from his mother, but these were quickly brushed away. The Emperor T'ung Chih had a sudden relapse and died; and anyone at all acquainted with the history of this period may be forgiven for suggesting that his mother—if indeed she was his mother—aided his departure.

Whatever may be the truth about T'ung Chih's abrupt departure from this world, his unhappy widow did not long survive him and her child was never born. There could be no rival claimant to the throne: Tzu Hsi could at least see to that.

A Lu-te died as suddenly as her husband, and the two-year-old child whom Tzu Hsi called Kuang Hsu, the Illustrious Successor, ascended unchallenged to the throne.

Sudden and mysterious deaths were not new in China. One of the fascinating pamphlets on the decadence of the Manchus which Backhouse and Bland quote in their *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking* tells of the facilities existing inside the walls of the Great Within for accelerating departures to the world of ancestors. 'The collection of poisons in the Palace,' writes an Anhui pamphleteer, 'comprised drugs of such potency that with some death followed on mere contact with the lips, while others took many days to operate and were not to be detected by any Chinese methods. Many of these drugs had come down from the Ming dynasty. Some of them were said to have been brought from Italy in K'ang Hsi's day by foreigners at the court.'⁶ The secrets of the Borgias were spiced with oriental ingenuity.

Such precious heirlooms as these together with silken strangling cords were in frequent use during the rule of Tzu Hsi.

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The period of Old Buddha's second regency began with the fatal illness of T'ung Chih and continued without interruption until 1889—the year her weak-willed nephew Kuang Hsu came of age. At the beginning of this period she was a woman of forty, and into her years she had crowded most of the sins of the calendar.

In April 1881 Tzu Hsi sent Tzu An some special cakes. The senior empress—in name at least—fell ill after eating them and died a few hours later. But villainy is good at disguising itself. Dr Martin, whose knowledge of China was remarkable for a foreigner, commented thus on this event in the opening years of the present century: 'The death of the senior Dowager left the second Dowager alone in her glory. So harmoniously had they co-operated during their joint regency, and so submissive had the former been to the will of the latter, that there was no ground for suspicion of foul play, yet such suspicions are always on the wing, like bats in the twilight of an Oriental court.'⁷

There is reason to believe Dr Martin was too charitable in his dismissal of foul play; though one ought not to blame him for this. It is good to give the living the benefit of the doubt, and Tzu Hsi was still very much alive when he wrote. During the Second World War a great deal of nonsense was talked and written about the excellences of the Chiang Kai-shek regime; and this was in an age when people were far more outspoken about the rulers of the earth than they were when Victoria and Edward VII were on the throne.

But the life story of Tzu Hsi gives us no reason to believe her a merciful woman. Her closest companions were eunuchs who had spent their lives in plot and counter-plot, and whose very existence depended on getting rid of a possible enemy or rival before he or she was in a position to threaten them. The Forbidden City and the Garden of Perfect Brightness to which the court retired in the summer were no places for breeding the quality of mercy. And if the memoirs written by some

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Chinese contemporaries who based their accounts on what eunuchs and others told them are something more than a conspiracy to defame Old Buddha's memory, it is hard to doubt that Tzu An knew too much about Tzu Hsi to be allowed to go on living.

What is it Tzu An is supposed to have known? First, she is said to have shown Tzu Hsi a mandate given to her by Hsien Feng on his death-bed. This revealed that emperor's suspicions of his imperial concubine in words that admitted of no ambiguity. Yehonala, the emperor had said, 'is utterly untrustworthy, and capable of any crime. . . . If she behaves herself, well and good; treat her with all kindness. But if her misdeeds become flagrant, you must summon the chief ministers to your (Tzu An's) presence and show them this decree, which authorises you to compel her to commit suicide.'⁸ Tzu An showed this document to the Western Empress and then burnt it before the eyes of the enraged co-regent to prove the genuineness of her friendship for her. 'It was then,' says a contemporary, 'that Tzu Hsi made up her mind to kill the Eastern Empress.'

But there were other secrets which Tzu An knew about. She had lived with Tzu Hsi for so long that it was difficult for the latter to conceal some of the more unsavoury episodes in her private life. There was a story of a eunuch friend who was no eunuch at all.⁹ There was a fashionable Peking actor who had been discovered by Tzu An calmly reclining on the Old Buddha's 'phoenix bed', and in consequence had to be poisoned by his dowager mistress to prevent wagging tongues. There was the amour with a waiter from a local restaurant.

Truth did not matter so much in the Great Within as what was believed to be true. Reputations are curiously brittle things, and Tzu Hsi did not enjoy being disliked any more than most of us do. And even if she could have forgotten all these grounds for her hatred of Tzu An, she could never forget that the Eastern Empress had signed the decree which had resulted

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in the execution of the former Chief Eunuch and favourite of Tzu Hsi, An Te-hai, during a trip to Shantung in 1869. The gift of poisoned honey cakes which was sent to the Palace of Peace and Tranquillity had been long premeditated, and was accompanied by Tzu Hsi's most bitter thoughts.

In 1888 Kuang Hsu, the ninth emperor of the Ta Ch'ing dynasty, prepared to take over the government; and Tzu Hsi at last thought about retiring to her retreat in the Western Hills.

Old Buddha was immensely fond of the summer palaces outside Peking, which she had first explored in the company of the Emperor Hsien Feng. Perhaps her hatred of foreigners had something to do with the destruction of the Yuan Ming Yuan by the British and French troops in 1860. She had set her heart on restoring it to its former glory; and T'ung Chih had toyed with the idea of rebuilding the gardens in 1873 so that he could rid himself of his mother's overpowering presence in the capital. Had the restoration taken place, it would have been euphemistically described as an act of filial piety, and gone down in the books as an inspiration to posterity. But on that occasion there was no need for the chronicler to keep his tongue in his cheek. Government funds would not run to the great expenditure required, and as it turned out, Tzu Hsi found plenty to occupy her mind in the Forbidden City.

By 1888 Tzu Hsi was again looking westwards to the purple hills—and this time to the Wan Shou Shan, a smaller site on the K'un Ming Lake of which the great Emperor Ch'ien Lung had been extremely fond. Here a New Summer Palace was built for the retirement of the remarkable lady who was now fifty-four years old.

An imperial edict published in March 1888 gave the reason for this in characteristic Chinese phraseology. 'Last year,' Kuang Hsu is made to say, 'we received Her Majesty's commands to assume the personal control of the government, but she was graciously pleased to vouchsafe to our childish inex-

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perience the benefit of her advice. When we reflect on the arduous exertions and the unremitting attention, extending to the minutest details, which our reverend mother has bestowed on the government of this great Empire for more than twenty years, during the present and the preceding reigns, we feel night and day inward uneasiness and searchings of heart at the thought that she has no place at her disposal wherein she might seek rest and enjoyment during the little leisure that is left after the discharge of the manifold duties of state. . . .'¹⁰

Words could have done no more! All China from courtiers to the cotton-clad coolies must have been moved to tears by this picture of poor weary Tzu Hsi, worn out before her poison cupboard, longing for a breath of country air! As for Kuang Hsu, that weak emperor was going to experience much more 'inward uneasiness' and many more 'searchings of heart' before Old Buddha had finished with him.

Yet he probably felt the worst was over when Old Buddha gave up 'lowering the screen and attending to state business', and moved her official abode from the Palace of Kindliness and Tranquillity to the Palace of Tranquil Old Age, and departed in person for Wan Shou Shan.

There amid the rural beauties which the landscape gardeners had created—with the help of generous funds appropriated from the Chinese naval estimates—on the edges of a peaceful lake, she waited and watched. In accordance with long-established tradition, she suffered no 'diminution of dignity or prestige, or even of power, by reason of (her) nominal surrender of the imperial functions'.¹¹ For she was the senior representative of the imperial family. In her presence no one, not even the emperor or the empress he had just married, sat down without her permission, and never on a seat more exalted than her own.

Thus the fact that Tzu Hsi delighted in her New Summer Palace, enjoyed picnics in the great park and watching the paddle boat when it got stuck in the lakeside mud, took part

in amateur theatricals and particularly relished taking for herself the appropriate role of Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy—this does not mean that she had forsworn power for the sake of pleasure.

Far from it. In February 1889 she had seen the emperor married to her favourite niece. This girl was unattractive, shrewish, and strong-willed. It was no love match. Tzu Hsi had selected the empress 'less with a view to the Emperor's felicity than to the furtherance of her own purposes, which necessitated the presence by his side of someone who would watch over, and report on, his proceedings and proclivities'.¹² It was hardly surprising that Kuang Hsu should have preferred the company of the senior concubines Pearl and Lustrous to that of his nagging, spying wife. But even here Tzu Hsi took a hand. She had the concubines degraded in rank for their extravagance, and Prince Tsai Chu given a severe taste of the bamboo for ignoring one of her orders. When she learned that one of the imperial tutors had liberal reformist sympathies and wanted the court to alter its established ways, she ordered his dismissal.

The Emperor Kuang Hsu was free to rule in his own way—so long as it was her way too. He made constant visits to the Summer Palace to bow down before his venerable aunt. Once, in the matter of an appointment to the Tea and Salt Administration, he successfully defied her. A man named Yu Ming had been given this lucrative post on the intervention of Tzu Hsi, and eventually he came to Kuang Hsu's audience chamber to offer thanks for the post.

But the man who hoped to enrich himself with government money overreached himself. Kuang Hsu discovered, on telling him to write a short account of his career, that the man was illiterate. In a rage he ordered that Yu Ming should not have the post he coveted.

It was a lonely victory and an unimportant one. The young emperor and those in the court who favoured his rule as

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against that of the Old Buddha and the Chief Eunuch Li Lien-ying—whose boast it was ‘that he could make or mar the highest officials at his pleasure and defy the Son of Heaven on his Throne’¹³—doubtless made the most of it. Yet they must have known how insecure they were. If not, they were soon reminded when she had a eunuch executed for advising the emperor to weed out Old Buddha’s spies from among those in constant attendance on him. Tzu Hsi had a long arm.

At this time the influence of western ideas was growing in China—especially in the south where criticism of the decadent Manchus gathered momentum under the leadership of men like Sun Yat-sen. Secret societies pledged to do away with Manchu misrule flourished. But there were still others who believed that even the Manchus were capable of reform, and that Kuang Hsu, weak though he was, had the makings of a real ruler in him.

In Peking the Emperor Kuang Hsu and the enthusiastic reformer K’ang Yu-wei got together, with many an anxious glance over their shoulders towards the Western Hills and the pavilions of Tzu Hsi, to plan a reformed China. But there were too many lovers of the *status quo* around them, and in the last resort the emperor was unable to prevent these reactionaries from getting news of his actions to Tzu Hsi.

In September 1898 the sedan chair of the Empress Dowager appeared suddenly at the West Gate of the Forbidden City. Before her wrath the twenty-eight year old emperor was powerless. By her orders he was taken to an island in the little South Lake adjoining the Forbidden City and kept there under guard. A decade of misery was to be his reward. K’ang Yu-wei owed his life to a warning from the Emperor, and escaped abroad.

Like the Greeks, the Chinese had a word for it. The announcement said: ‘The emperor being ill, the Empress Dowager has resumed the regency.’ It was as simple as that.

The year of the *coup d’état* was the year of the Boxers. The

wave of terror which fanned out in the train of the Boxers ended with the siege of the Legations and the entry of the foreign armies once again into Peking in the year 1900.

There were those at court—Old Buddha among them—who hoped that the Fists of Righteous Harmony would drive the foreign devils back into the Eastern Ocean. But it was not to be. This anti-Christian, anti-foreign movement would certainly have petered out much sooner than it did if it had not possessed so many sympathisers in high places. As it was, over three hundred foreign missionaries and other residents were killed in the slaughter before the foreign troops arrived in Peking to raise the siege and enforce their demands.

Old Buddha, enraged by her inability to implement her hatred of the foreigners, did not await the arrival of the soldiers. Together with the Emperor Kuang Hsu, her chief crony the eunuch Li Lien-ying, and a handful of servants—all disguised as peasants—she hired mule litters at the Tung Ho stables and left Peking through the Gate of Righteous Victory. From here she made her way south westwards to the great walled city of Ch'angan which had once been the finest capital in the world. But before she left Peking she buried her treasure and had Pearl Concubine murdered.

In his young manhood the Emperor Kuang Hsu had few consolations; but of these Chen Fei or Pearl Concubine was the greatest. She solaced him for his marriage to the shrewish, unattractive Lung Yu, who was Tzu Hsi's niece, and took his part against the formidable old lady. When Kuang Hsu was imprisoned on the island in the lake, she was also put in confinement. But Tzu Hsi saw she should not share the enforced exile.

She ordered the eunuch Li Lien-ying to throw Chen Fei down the little well in the north-east corner of the Forbidden City before the horrified eyes of the half-starved emperor.

Fleeing for the second time before the armies of the hated westerners, Tzu Hsi did not create a good impression on

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those of her people who encountered her on the journey through Shensi. Wu Yung¹⁴ has given us a picture of a wretched, tired woman dressed in cotton, sucking down millet porridge, chewing sticks of sugar cane and smoking a water-pipe. The bodyguard conveying the Sacred Chariot was even hungrier and more tired than Tzu Hsi herself, and freely helped themselves to what had been left behind in deserted farm-houses by people who had not stayed to pay their respects.

‘It is doubtful,’ writes Reginald F. Johnstone, ‘whether she had any suspicion that she had brought the dynasty to the edge of an abyss. Always surrounded by flatterers and deceivers, always attended by persons whose interest it was to remove any misgivings she might have as to her own wisdom, she was unable to see things as they really were or to profit, except to a very limited extent, from experience. Had she been endowed with outstanding qualities of character and brain she might have risen superior to the corrupt influences that surrounded her; but she possessed no such qualities. Her ignorance of the world outside China was abysmal. . . .’¹⁵

As the year 1902 opened, little wiser for the tour she had made into the old heart of the Chinese Empire, Old Buddha, after pausing to burn incense at the Lao Yeh Temple when passing the city gate, returned to the Great Within.

In one of those numerous decrees of hers with which she salved her conscience and explained away her faults, she expressed her feelings to her countrymen and the world at large. ‘I have now returned once more to my Palace and find the ancestral Temples reposing as of old in dignified and unbroken serenity. Beneath the deep awe which overcomes me in the presence of my glorious ancestors my soul feels an added weight of grief and remorse, and I only hope that by Heaven’s continued favour I may yet live to accomplish some meritorious work.’¹⁶

The Great Within looked the same; and yet it was a dif-

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ferent, a less private place. For strangers had looked with their profane eyes into its mysterious precincts for the first time, and the Japanese had even dared to photograph rooms which only the members of the court had known. Somehow things had imperceptibly changed; though Tzu Hsi had indeed come back again to her embroideries and tea parties; to her exquisite jades and paintings and muttering parrots; to her clocks and her mechanical dolls; to her boating trips; to the fawning courtiers and the ghosts of the murdered who haunted the pavilions and the terraces with the beautiful names.

The pleasures of return had, of course, to be combined with some head-choppings and other punishments for her Boxer allies. The foreign devils insisted on that. But Tzu Hsi's own position was secure enough: the foreigners had a great respect for thrones, whoever sat on them. Did not the wife of the senior foreign diplomat in Peking present her with an address welcoming 'Her Imperial Majesty back to her beautiful Capital'? Representatives of the western powers paid little more attention to the protests of reformers like K'ang Yu-wei than did Old Buddha herself. True, large indemnities had to be paid to foreign governments; but that would have no effect on the standard of living inside the Great Within. The people would merely have to work harder or eat less.

Yet certain gestures were now expected of Old Buddha. The ladies in the foreign legations would expect occasional invitations to tea; but very little condescension on her part would be needed to set these ladies simpering. It would certainly be necessary to simulate some interest in western civilization, to send representatives to report on the western way of doing things, and at least to talk about social progress and educational reform and a new draft constitution.

With an eye to public opinion inside China itself, the ghost of Pearl Concubine who had been murdered at her orders was propitiated by one of those flowery decrees which Tzu Hsi and her advisers so well knew how to write. The murdered

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girl was honoured both for her virtue and for the courage which 'led her virtuously to commit suicide when unable to catch up the Court on its departure'.¹⁷

It was during this last period of Tzu Hsi's rule that Princess Der Ling served as a lady in waiting to the Empress Dowager. In her book *Two Years in the Forbidden City* she describes the great Tzu Hsi as she looked in the audience chamber of the palace about this time.

The old lady was 'dressed in a beautiful yellow satin gown embroidered all over with pink peonies, and wearing the same kind of headdress with flowers on each side made of pearls and jade, a pearl tassel on the left side and a beautiful phoenix in the centre made of purest jade. Over her gown she wore a cape, the most magnificent and costly thing I ever saw. The cape was made of about three thousand five hundred pearls the size of a canary bird's egg, all exactly alike in colour and perfectly round. It was made on the fish net pattern and had a fringe of jade pendants and was joined with two pure jade clasps. In addition Her Majesty wore two pairs of pearl bracelets, one pair of jade bracelets, several jade rings and on her third and little fingers of her right hand she wore gold finger nail protectors about three inches long, and on the left hand two finger nail protectors made of jade and about the same length. Her shoes were trimmed with small tassels made of pearls and embroidered with tiny pieces of coloured jade. . . .'¹⁸

Who can doubt after such a description that the gestures expected of her were made with grace, even if they were only skin-deep? They did not alter China much.

The conservative influence was still strong at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, and the Revolution did not lack its martyrs. Kuang Hsu to the very end of his life made obeisance before the throne of the masterful woman who had dominated three emperors. She still despised and distrusted him and did nothing to cheer his imprisonment.

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In November 1908, after a mysterious illness, Kuang Hsu died amid the cheap furnishings of his miserable quarters.

Again the tongues have wagged and, as a delightful Chinese proverb says, where there is no wind the grass does not move. Old Buddha herself was known to be seriously ill. If she had died before her imperial nephew there might have been a thinning in the eunuch ranks. Li Lien-ying might have found his power suddenly curtailed. The solution was so simple. Two giant eunuchs armed with pillows could easily suffocate the weakling emperor who had grown sick and pale within the confines of the palace.

But we shall never know the whole story about these last dying years of the Chinese Empire. The stone lions with the open mouths that guarded the Gate of Heavenly Peace no doubt fulfilled their duty and reported to Heaven what was going on within the Forbidden City. But they have kept their own counsel.

Perhaps it is fitting that our brief account of the Old Buddha of Peking should end with a question-mark. For on the day after Kuang Hsu 'ascended the Dragon', Tzu Hsi herself fainted, recovered consciousness and died, with her face to the south as custom decreed, and her mouth wide open. The last support of the Manchu throne toppled and fell; and for the last time was carried by her bearers out of the Great Within, with its atmosphere clouded with the suspicions and fears and beauties and horrors of Manchu decadence, on the final journey to the Eastern Tombs.

It is hard to believe the report of her last words is a true one. But if it is, she showed more real wisdom in her last minutes than in most of her long life. She told the sycophants about her couch to beware of the meddling of eunuchs, and warned them never again to entrust such power as she had possessed to a woman.

Some at least of the treasure she had hidden before her second flight from the capital was carried with her body in

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the catafalque on the four day journey to the burial grounds, and was buried in the great tomb. Li Len-ying later stated that the buried treasure was worth five million pounds. Jewels of great variety and worth, gold ornaments, sacrificial vessels of carved jade, and precious articles of every kind were heaped in and around the coffin.

There they stayed for twenty years. Then one day in July 1928 soldiers came to the tombs with sticks of dynamite in a search for plunder. They blew open the tomb, forced the coffin, and hacked the jewelled body to pieces. The jewels were never recovered. They made their way by bits and pieces to the jewel markets of the world.

Of the woman who once wore them, nothing final can be said. By the Reformers and the Revolutionists she was spoken of as a wicked ogre, unspeakably evil. By the European ladies of the legations, who saw only the superficial shimmers of pomp and circumstance and felt in her presence what snobs the world over feel in the presence of majesty, she was thought gracious and charming. To others who knew her well she was a highly gifted woman with refined tastes and savage irascible moods. The truth is likely to include many apparent contradictions; for the sweeping epithets we pin on one another as identifying labels are never the final judgment.

To judge the Old Buddha by standards other than those of her own time and place is to be less than charitable. She was one of the final products of that Great Within where most of her life was spent. That city had its own ways of life and its own standards. The corruption as well as the beauty of the past had crept into the very stones; the air itself was tainted with the virus of decay. This was no place for innocence; heredity and environment were in league against it.

A few years after Tzu Hsi's death, the Great Within was thrown open to the curious in the Great Without; it was a Forbidden City no longer. Tyrants were not dead in the world; nor had secret diplomacy and jiggery-pokery fled from

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the earth. But a phase of tyranny ended when Tzu Hsi died—the last great ruler of an empire that had been created by Shih Huang-ti more than two thousand years before.

The funerals of both rulers were magnificent; their tombs ornate and wonderful. And one may think, perhaps, that the Old Buddha had more in common with the First Emperor than she had with the new world spirit battering at the gates of the Great Within. It seems more than a trifle incongruous that she should have survived into the twentieth century and have had her funeral reported by a correspondent of *The Times*.

NOTES AND SOURCES

CHAPTER I

1. The main source of this chapter is WU SHU CHIUNG, *Hsi Shih, Beauty of Beauties*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1931.
2. From a poem by Wang Wei of the T'ang dynasty. Quoted with a single alteration from CHENG TIEN-HSI, *China Moulded by Confucius*, Stevens, 1946, p. 102.
3. *The Travels of Marco Polo* (translated by Marsden), Everyman's Library, 1908, reprinted 1950, p. 296.
4. HENRI MASPERO, *La Chine Antiqué*, Paris, 1927, pp. 33-4.
5. Slightly modified translation by SHIGEYOSHI OBATA, *The Works of Li Po*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922, p. 72.
6. WU SHU CHIUNG, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
7. SHIGEYOSHI OBATA, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

CHAPTER II

1. 'The Great Wall of Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, in the third century B.C., ran to the north of the hilly part of the province of Jehol instead of to the south, as does the present main line of the Great Wall, which is for the most part the work of the Ming dynasty (1368-1643).' Quoted from LI CHI, *Manchuria in History* by OWEN LATTIMORE, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, New York, American Geographical Society, 1940, p. 103 note.
2. DERK BODDE, *China's First Unifier*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1938.
3. WOLFRAM EBERHARD, *A History of China*, Kegan Paul, 1950, pp. 66-67.
4. Article in *The New China Review*, Shanghai, 1919, Vol. I, p. 19.
5. In the third century B.C. seven states made up the Middle Kingdom, and Ch'in was the greatest of these.
6. L. CARRINGTON GOODRICH, *A Short History of the Chinese People*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1948, p. 30.
7. Freely translated from that great source-book, EDOUARD CHAVANNES, *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-Ma Ts'ien*, Paris, 1897, Vol. II, p. 128.
8. C. P. FITZGERALD, *China: A Short Cultural History*, London, Cresset Press, rev. edit., 1950, p. 137.
9. This gorgeous capital was utterly destroyed in the wars that brought the Ch'in dynasty to its end. Hsienyang stood slightly N.W. of the city of Ch'angan, which became the Han capital.
10. VERNE DYSON, *Forgotten Tales of Ancient China*, Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1934, pp. 353-4.
11. W. E. GEIL, *The Great Wall of China*, London, John Murray, 1909.
12. Quoted from CHAVANNES, *op. cit.*, by BODDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 7.
13. C. P. FITZGERALD, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
14. L. C. GOODRICH, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
15. C. P. FITZGERALD, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

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16. See discussion in D. BODDE, *op. cit.*, p. 162 *et seq.*
17. CHAVANNES, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 172-3.
18. CHENG TIEN-HSI, *China Moulded by Confucius*, Stevens, 1946, p. 28.
19. CHAVANNES, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 176 note.
20. H. G. CREEL, *The Birth of China*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1936, p. 209.

CHAPTER III

Interesting popular accounts of the Emperor Wu may be found in A. E. GRANTHAM, *Hills of Blue*, Methuen, 1927, and MAURICE COLLIS, *The First Holy One*, Faber and Faber, 1948.

1. G. WILLOUGHBY-MEADE, *Chinese Ghouls and Goblins*, London, Constable, 1928, p. 53.
2. C. P. FITZGERALD, *Son of Heaven*, Cambridge University Press, 1933, p. 2.
3. E. A. THOMPSON, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford, 1948.
4. HERBERT A. GILES, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, London, Quaritch, 1898, p. 792.
5. PAN KU, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. II, translated by Homer H. Dubs, Baltimore, Waverly Press Inc., 1944, p. 132.
6. AUREL STEIN, *On Ancient Central-Asian Tracks*, London, Macmillan, 1933, p. 18.
7. OWEN LATTIMORE, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, New York, American Geographical Society, 1940, pp. 484-5.
8. PAN KU, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66. Such figures as are cited here must, of course, be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. The Chinese liking for round numbers is well known, and the reports of their military leaders were written partly for their own glorification. Particular exception has been taken to the size of the Hsiung-nu forces stated in these reports. For comments on this point, see E. A. THOMPSON, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, Oxford, 1948, p. 46.
9. PAN KU, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
10. J. J. M. DE GROOT, *The Religion of the Chinese*, New York, Macmillan, 1910, pp. 148-9.
11. HERBERT A. GILES, *Gems of Chinese Literature—Prose*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh Ltd., 1923, p. 152.
12. LIONEL GILES, *A Gallery of Chinese Immortals*, London, John Murray, 1948, p. 39.
13. Those interested in making their own gold will find a recipe quoted from the *Pao P'u Tzu* by C. P. FITZGERALD, *China: A Short Cultural History*, London, Cresset Press, 1950, p. 270.
14. LIONEL GILES, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
15. ARTHUR WALEY, Introduction to LI CHIH-CHANG, *The Travels of an Alchemist*, London, Routledge, 1931, p. 11.
16. ARTHUR WALEY, *Chinese Poems*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1946, p. 42.
17. VERNE DYSON, *Forgotten Tales of Ancient China*, Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1934, p. 215 *et seq.*

Notes and Sources

18. LIONEL GILES, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
19. A popular discussion of the sacrifices can be seen in FLORENCE AYSCOUGH, *A Chinese Mirror*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1925, p. 350 *et seq.*, based on E. CHAVANNES, *Tai Chan, Monographie d'un Culte Chinois*.
20. PAN KU, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
21. Cited in J. J. M. DE GROOT, *The Religious System of China*, Leiden, 1907, Vol. V, p. 829.
22. PAN KU, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
23. Cited in A. E. GRANTHAM, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

CHAPTER IV

1. Cited VERNE DYSON, *Forgotten Tales of Ancient China*, Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1934, p. 142.
2. This chapter is based on the translation by C. H. BREWITT-TAYLOR of LO KWAN-CHUNG's fourteenth century—recent scholarship suggests the seventeenth century—novel, *San Kuo Chih Yen I (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)* which was based on historical records. The translation was published by Kelly & Walsh, Shanghai, 1925. All the quotations in this chapter are taken from this work.

CHAPTER V

1. WOODBRIDGE BINGHAM, *The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty*, Baltimore, Waverly Press, 1941, p. 6. This book is the main source for this chapter.
2. HENRI IMBERT, *L'Empereur Yang-Ti, Le Sardanapale Chinois*, Pekin, 'Politique de Pekin', 1922.
3. BINGHAM, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
4. HERBERT A. GILES, *Gems of Chinese Literature—Prose*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1923, p. 156.
5. DERK BODDE, *China's First Unifier*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1938, pp. 36-7.
6. WOLFRAM EBERHARD, *A History of China*, Kegan Paul, 1950, p. 181.
7. TSUI CHI, *A Short History of Chinese Civilization*, Gollancz, 1942, p. 124.
8. BINGHAM, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
9. The Minister Kao Yao in the reign of Shun (2255-2198 B.C.) had said: 'Heaven hears and sees through the ears and eyes of our people. Heaven expresses its disapproval through the expressed disapproval of our people; such connection is there between the upper and lower worlds.' Quoted LIN YUTANG (edit.), *The Wisdom of China*, Michael Joseph, 1949, p. 133.
10. C. P. FITZGERALD, *Son of Heaven*, Cambridge University Press, 1933, pp. 27-8.

CHAPTER VI

1. & 2. ARTHUR WALEY, *The Poetry and Career of Li Po*, Allen and Unwin, 1950, p. 50. This authoritative little book is my main source for this chapter.
3. 'He is the only well-known writer who neither went in for the Literary Examinations (the normal method of entry into the Civil Service) nor ever held any regular official post. If we look at the lives of his twelve best-

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known contemporaries we find that there was not one who did not sit for these examinations, and all but two passed. The great poet Tu Fu was one of the two that failed (in 735), but he got into the service unexamined in 757, at a time when owing to the Revolution ordinary methods of recruitment had broken down.' *Ibid.*, p. 98.

4. For discussion *ibid.*, p. 103 *et seq.*
5. SHIGEYOSHI OBATA, *The Works of Li Po*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922, pp. 8-9.
6. Unless stated to the contrary, all quotations of Li Po's poetry are from Mr Waley.
7. OBATA, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
8. WALEY, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
9. Wang Chi, whose official career was marred by his inability to keep sober, wrote a prose eulogy of Drunk-land.
10. OBATA, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
12. WALEY, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
14. FLORENCE AYSCOUGH, *A Chinese Mirror*, Jonathan Cape, 1925, p. 137.

CHAPTER VII

1. The main source used here has been WU SHU-CHIUNG, *Yang Kuei-fei, The Most Famous Beauty of China*, London, Brentano's Ltd., 1924.
2. Another account says she was born in Szechwan. See PANKING, *Galerie des Femmes Célèbres de la Chine*, Pekin, 'Politique de Pekin', 1924, p. 59.
3. SHIGEYOSHI OBATA, *The Works of Li Po*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922, p. 31.
4. Translated by CHING TI from PO CHU-I's *The Everlasting Sorrow* in ROBERT PAYNE (edit.) *The White Pony*, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 216.
5. PANKING, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
6. Sometimes, however, An Lu-shan is spoken of as fat and ugly. It may be that Yang Kuei-fei liked fat, ugly men: it may be that An Lu-shan was not fat and ugly at all, and that such personal descriptions of him derive from the dislike of Chinese historians. Who can tell? 'We cannot,' writes ARTHUR WALEY (*The Life and Times of Po Chu-i*, Allen and Unwin, pp. 50-51), 'at this distance of time construct any theory about his personal qualities or behaviour.'
7. There are other versions of how An Lu-shan got his promotion.
8. OBATA, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
9. WALEY, *The Poetry and Career of Li Po*, Allen and Unwin, 1950, p. 50.
10. WALEY, *The Life and Times of Po Chu-i*, pp. 50-1 for brief comments on this.
11. PAYNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-7.

CHAPTER VIII

1. HERBERT A. GILES, *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*,

Notes and Sources

- Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1905, p. 169. This book is a treasurehouse of painting legend. To its distinguished author I am greatly indebted.
2. ERNEST F. FENOLLOSA, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Heinemann, 1912, Vol. I, p. 137.
 3. S. TAJIMA (editor), *Selected Relics of Japanese Art*, Tokyo, Nippon Shimbi Kyokwai, 1907, Vol. I.
 4. Hui-chih was a contemporary sculptor.
 5. FENOLLOSA, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 130.
 6. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 7-8.
 7. See story of Emperor Ming's dream in A.D. 61 in K. L. REICHELT, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 10-12.
 8. RAPHAEL PETRUCCI, *Chinese Painters*, London, Brentano's Ltd., 1922, p. 56.
 9. GILES, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
 10. E. T. C. WERNER, *Myths and Legends of China*, London, Harrap, 1922, pp. 249-50.
 11. C. E. VULLIAMY, *John Wesley*, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1931, p. 111.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
 13. E. T. WILLIAMS, *China, Yesterday and Today*, Harrap, 5th Edition (revised), 1933, p. 312.
 14. GILES, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.
 15. For an account of this painter's life and work see AGNES E. MEYER, *Chinese Painting, as reflected in the Thought and Art of Li Lung-mien*, New York, Duffield and Co., 1923.
 16. LAURENCE BINYON, *The Flight of the Dragon*, London, John Murray, 1911, p. 111.

CHAPTER IX

1. This chapter is based on GENEVIEVE WIMSATT, *Selling Wilted Peonies*, Biography and Songs of Yu Hsuan-chi, T'ang Poetess, New York, Columbia University Press, 1936.
2. HERBERT A. GILES, *Gems of Chinese Literature—Verse*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1923, p. 149.
3. Cited in L. T. HOBHOUSE, *Morals in Evolution*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1915, p. 194 note.
4. OLGA LANG, *Chinese Family and Society*, Yale University Press, 1946, p. 50.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
6. All poetical quotations unless stated to the contrary are from WIMSATT, *op. cit.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
8. For the lapses of nuns from the approved behaviour patterns see chapter entitled 'The Olde Daunce' in EILEEN POWER, *Medieval English Nunneries*, Cambridge University Press, 1922.
9. W. E. H. LECKY, *History of European Morals*, Longmans, Green and Co., 1911 edition, Vol. II, p. 331.
10. 'The novice who entered a nunnery, to live there as a nun for the rest of her natural life, might do so for very various reasons. For those who entered

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young and of their own will, religion was either a profession or a vocation. They might take the veil because it offered an honourable career for superfluous girls, who were unwilling or unable to marry; or they might take it in a real spirit of devotion, with a real call to the religious life. For other girls the nunnery might be a prison, into which they were thrust, unwilling but afraid to resist, by elders who wished to be rid of them; and many nunneries contained also another class of inmates, older women, often widows, who had retired thither to end their days in peace. A career, a vocation, a prison, a refuge; to its different inmates the medieval nunnery was all these things.' POWER, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

11. Cited in LIN YUTANG, *My Country and My People*, New York, John Day, 1935, pp. 128-131.
12. WIMSATT, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
13. ARTHUR WALEY, *The Life and Times of Po Chu-i*, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 192.
14. LECKY, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 293.
15. SHIGEYOSHI OBATA, *The Works of Li Po*, New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1922, p. 1.
16. Equivalent to the 'Preparatory Torture' in Medieval Europe, to elicit avowal of crime.

CHAPTER X

1. The main source for this chapter is the full-length biography by LIN YUTANG, *The Gay Genius*, Heinemann, 1948.
2. The verses are all quoted from LIN YUTANG, *op. cit.*
3. C. P. FITZGERALD, *China: A Short Cultural History*, London, Cresset Press, rev. edit. 1950, p. 395.
4. LIN YUTANG, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
5. See the famous description in EILEEN POWER's essay on Marco Polo in *Medieval People*, Pelican, 1937, pp. 42-44.
6. E. R. HUGHES, *The Great Learning and the Mean-in-Action*, Everyman's Library, 1942, pp. 41-2.
7. LIN YUTANG, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

CHAPTER XI

1. WOLFRAM EBERHARD, *A History of China*, Kegan Paul, 1950, p. 92.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-5.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 274-5.
4. ARTHUR W. HUMMEL, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*, Washington, The Library of Congress, 1943-4, 2 vols.
5. E. BACKHOUSE and J. O. P. BLAND, *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking*, London, Heinemann, 1914, p. 55. To this fascinating volume my debt will be obvious.
6. HERBERT A. GILES, *Gems of Chinese Literature—Prose*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1923, p. 155.

Notes and Sources

7. FLORENCE AYSCOUGH, *A Chinese Mirror*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1925, p. 291.
8. LIN YUTANG, *The Gay Genius*, Heinemann, 1948, p. 291.
9. BACKHOUSE and BLAND, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.
12. From early times 'the use of philtre-maggots by women desirous of exciting the lusts of men and attracting them into debauchery' was common. See J. J. M. DE GROOT, *The Religious System of China*, Leiden, 1907, Vol. V, p. 827.
13. BACKHOUSE and BLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

CHAPTER XII

1. Translated by HELEN WADDELL.
2. HENRI IMBERT, *Les Concubines Chinoises Célèbres, Pan Tsié-yu et Tchao-Kiun*, Pekin, 'Politique de Pekin', 1921. A longer account differing in many details is in SHU-CHIUNG, *Chao Chün*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1934.
3. ARTHUR WALEY, *The Life and Times of Po Chu-i*, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 13.
3. ARTHUR WALEY, *Chinese Poems*, Allen and Unwin, 1946, p. 42.
4. ARTHUR WALEY, *The Life and Times of Po Chu-i*, Allen and Unwin, 1949, p. 13.

* * * * *

5. SVEN HEDIN, *Jehol, City of Emperors*, Kegan Paul, 1932, pp. 220-1.

CHAPTER XIII

1. Cited in JOHN GILBERT REID, *Peking's First Manchu Emperor* in 'The Pacific Historical Review', California, U.S.A., 1935, Vol. V, p. 135 *et seq.* To this article I am indebted for the outline of Fu-lin's reign.
2. Those interested in the contacts between the Dalai Lamas and China should consult W. W. ROCKHILL's short and authoritative *The Dalai Lamas of Lhasa and their Relations with the Manchu Emperors of China 1644-1908*. Reprinted from the *T'oung Pao*, Leyden, 1910, Series III, Vol. I, No. 1.
3. Account of Baikoff's embassy in JOHN F. BADDELEY, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, London, Macmillan and Co., 1919, p. 143.
4. R. F. JOHNSTONE, *The Romance of an Emperor* in 'The New China Review', Shanghai, 1920, Vol. II, pp. 193.
5. W. ARTHUR CORNABY, *The Secret of the Red Chamber* in 'The New China Review', Shanghai, 1919, Vol. I, No. 4.
6. R. F. JOHNSTONE, *op. cit.*, p. 189. To this intriguing article I owe the hypothetical part of this chapter.
7. See article on Fu-lin in A. W. HUMMEL, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Washington, The Library of Congress, 1943-4, Vol. I.
8. J. F. BADDELEY, *op. cit.*, p. 386 note.
9. E. BACKHOUSE and J. O. P. BLAND, *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking*, London, Heinemann, 1914, p. 237.

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CHAPTER XIV

1. 'It would be unjust to say that these publications are all fictitious. Some, indeed, may be regarded as mere "catch-pennies"; others seem to have been produced to gratify the very human craving for what G. K. CHESTERTON calls "the divine institution of gossip"; others, again, were probably invented in order to supply the revolutionary party with anti-monarchic propaganda, and with a view to bringing discredit or ridicule on the imperial house. Nevertheless there is no reason to doubt that a limited number of these widely-circulated stories contain a fair proportion of truth, and may therefore be regarded as possessing some historical interest and value. The difficulty is to know where fact begins and fiction ends.'—R. F. JOHNSTONE, *The Romance of an Emperor* in 'The New China Review', Shanghai, 1920, Vol. II, pp. 1-2.
2. E. BACKHOUSE and J. O. P. BLAND, *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking*, London, Heinemann, 1914, p. 409. In this chapter too I have drawn heavily on the wealth of material to be found in this volume.
3. For a history of this famous garden, see HOPE DANBY, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1950.
4. For more about this Jade Seal, see E. T. HIBBERT, *K'ang Hsi, Emperor of China*, Kegan Paul, 1940, pp. 3-4, and CHENG TIEN-HSI, *China Moulded by Confucius*, Stevens, 1946, pp. 250-2.
5. BACKHOUSE and BLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 419.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 484.
7. W. A. P. MARTIN, *The Awakening of China*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 273.
8. BACKHOUSE and BLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 476.
9. This was not an unheard-of event. In the third century B.C. a malicious story was current about the Dowager Queen, mother of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, to the effect that she ordered a man of redoubtable sexual powers to be shaved to resemble an eunuch superficially, so that he could enter the women's quarters of the palace and have intercourse with her. See DERK BODDE, *Statesman, Patriot and General in Ancient China*, New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1940, p. 7.
10. C. B. MALONE, *History of the Peking Summer Palaces under the Ch'ing Dynasty*, Urbana, University of Illinois, 1934, p. 197.
11. On this point see REGINALD F. JOHNSTONE, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, Gollancz, 1934, p. 27 *et seq.*
12. J. O. P. BLAND and E. BACKHOUSE, *China under the Empress Dowager*, Peking edition, Vetch, 1939, p. 143.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
14. WU YUNG, *The Flight of an Empress*, Faber and Faber, 1937.
15. R. F. JOHNSTONE, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
16. BLAND and BACKHOUSE, Vetch, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
18. Quoted in MALONE, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

INDEX OF NAMES

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